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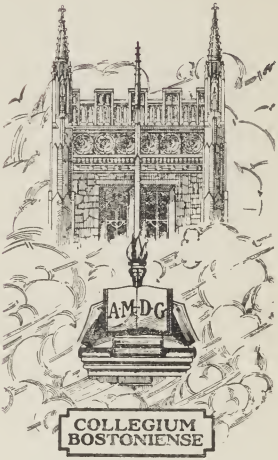

In Memory Of
John Boyle O'Reilly

Mary Boyle O'Reilly
1898

FRANCIS D. HETZLE
Plain and Fancy Rul
And BOOK BINDIN
Sun Iron Buildi

THE

BRITISH CLASSICKS.

VOLUME THE SIXTY-THIRD.

CONTAINING THE FIFTH VOLUME OF

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THE

WORKS

OF

LAURENCE STERNE,

IN SIX VOLUMES;

CONTAINING

THE LIFE AND OPINIONS OF TRISTRAM SHANDY, GENT.....A SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY THROUGH FRANCE AND ITALY..... SERMONS.....LETTERS, &c.

WITH

A LIFE OF THE AUTHOR,

WRITTEN BY HIMSELF.

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BY

LAURENCE STERNE.

SERMON XXIII.

THE PARABLE OF THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS CONSIDERED.

LUKE XVI. 31.

And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one should rise from the dead.

THESE words are the conclusion of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus; the design of which was, to shew us the necessity of conducting ourselves, by such lights as God had been pleased to give us: the sense and meaning of the patriarch's final determination in the text being this, That they who will not be persuaded to answer the great purposes of their being, upon such arguments as are offered to them in scripture, will never be persuaded to it by any other means, how extraordinary soever;—"If they hear not Moses and the prophets, "neither will they be persuaded though one should "rise from the dead."

——Rise from the dead! To what purpose? What could such a messenger propose or urge, which had not been proposed and urged already? The novelty or surprise of such a visit, might awaken the attention of a curious unthinking people, who spent their time in nothing else but to hear and tell some new thing; but ere the wonder was well over, some new wonder would start up in its room,

and then the man might return to the dead, from whence he came, and not a soul make one inquiry about him.

—This, I fear, would be the conclusion of the affair. But to bring this matter still closer to us, let us imagine, if there is nothing unworthy in it, that God, in compliance with a curious world,—or froma better motive,—in compassion to a sinful one, should vouchsafe to send one from the dead, to call home our conscience and make us better christians, better citizens, better men, and better servants to God than we are.

Now bear with me, I beseech you, in framing such an address as, I imagine, would be most likely to gain our attention, and conciliate the heart to what he had to say: the great channel to it is interest;—and there he would set out.

He might tell us, (after the most indisputable credentials of whom he served) That he was come a messenger from the great God of heaven, with reiterated proposals, whereby much was to be granted us on his side,—and something to be parted with on ours: but that, not to alarm us,—'twas neither houses, nor land, nor possessions;—'twas neither wives, nor children, nor brethren, nor sisters, which we had to forsake;—no one rational pleasure to be given up;—no natural endearment to be torn from.——

In a word, he would tell us, We had nothing to part with,—but what was not for our interests to keep,—and that was our vices; which brought death and misery to our doors.

He would go on, and prove it by a thousand arguments, that to be temperate and chaste, and just

and peaceable, and charitable and kind to one another,—was only doing that for CHRIST's sake, which was most for our own; and that, were we in a capacity of capitulating with God, upon what terms we would submit to his government;—he would convince us, 'twould be impossible for the wit of man to frame any proposals more for our present interests, than "to lead an uncorrupted life,—to do the thing which "is lawful and right," and lay such restraints upon our appetites as are for the honour of human nature and the refinement of human happiness.

When this point was made out, and the alarms from interest got over,—the spectre might address himself to the other passions.—In doing this, he could but give us the most engaging ideas of the perfections of God;—nor could he do more than impress the most awful ones of his majesty and power:—he might remind us, that we are creatures but of a day, hastening to the place from whence we shall not return;—that during our stay we stood accountable to this Being, who, though rich in mercies,—yet was terrible in his judgments;—that he took notice of all our actions,—that he was about our paths, and about our beds, and spied out all our ways; and was so pure in his nature, that he would punish even the wicked imaginations of the heart; and had appointed a day wherein he would enter into this enquiry.

He might add,——

But what?—with all the eloquence of an inspired tongue, What could he add or say to us, which has not been said before? The experiment has been tried a thousand times upon the hopes and fears, the reasons and passions of men, by all the powers

of nature :—the applications of which have been so great, and the variety of addresses so unanswerable, that there is not a greater paradox in the world than that so great a religion should be no better recommended by its professors.

The fact is, mankind are not always in a humour to be convinced ;—and so long as the pre-engagement with our passion subsists, it is not argumentation which can do the business ;—we may amuse ourselves with the ceremony of the operation, but we reason not with the proper faculty, when we see every thing in the shape and colouring in which the treachery of the senses paints it : and indeed, were we only to look into the world, and observe how inclinable men are to defend evil, as well as to commit it,—one would think, at first sight, they believed that all discourses of religion and virtue were mere matters of speculation for men to entertain some idle hours with ; and conclude very naturally, that we seemed to be agreed in no one thing but speaking well and acting ill. But the truest comment is in the text ;—" If they hear not Moses and " the prophets," &c.

If they are not brought over to the interests of religion upon such discoveries as God has made,—or has enabled them to make, they will stand out against all evidence :—in vain shall one rise for their conviction ;—was the earth to give up her dead,—'twould be the same;—every man would return again to his course, and the same bad passions would produce the same bad actions to the end of the world.

This is the principal lesson of the parable ; but I must enlarge upon the whole of it,—because it has some other useful lessons ; and they will best present themselves to us as we go along.

In this parable, which is one of the most remarkable in the gospel, our Saviour represents a scene, in which, by a kind of contrast, two of the most opposite conditions that could be brought together from human life, are pass'd before our imaginations.

The one, a man exalted above the level of mankind, to the highest pinnacle of prosperity,—to riches,—to happiness;—I say *happiness*,—in compliance with the world, and on a supposition that the possession of riches must make us happy, when the very pursuit of them so warms our imaginations, that we stake both body and soul upon the event; as if they were things not to be purchased at too dear a rate. They are the wages of wisdom,—as well as of folly.—Whatever was the case here, is beyond the purport of the parable;—the scripture is silent, and so should we; it marks only his outward condition, by the common appendages of it, in the two great articles of vanity and appetite:—to gratify the one, he was clothed in purple and fine linen: to satisfy the other, fared sumptuously every day;—and upon every thing too, we'll suppose, that climates could furnish,—that luxury could invent,—or the hand of science could torture.

Close by his gates is represented an object, whom Providence might seem to have placed there to cure the pride of man, and shew him to what wretchedness his condition might be brought: a creature in all the shipwreck of nature;—helpless,—undone,—in want of friends,—in want of health,—and in want of every thing with them which his distresses called for.

In this state he is described as desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table;

and though the case is not expressly put, that he was refused, yet, as the contrary is not affirmed in the historical part of the parable,—or pleaded after by the other, that he shewed mercy to the miserable,—we may conclude his request was unsuccessful;—like too many others in the world, either so high lifted up in it, that they cannot look down distinctly enough upon the sufferings of their fellow-creatures,—or, by long surfeiting in a continual course of banqueting and good cheer, they forget there is such a distemper as hunger in the catalogue of human infirmities.

Overcharged with this, and perhaps a thousand unpitied wants in a pilgrimage through an unhospitable world,—the poor man sinks silently under his burden.—But, good God! whence is this? Why dost thou suffer these hardships in a world which thou hast made? Is it for thy honour that one man should eat the bread of fulness, and so many of his own stock and lineage eat the bread of sorrow?—That this man should go clad in purple, and have all his paths strewed with rose-buds of delight, whilst so many mournful passengers go heavily along, and pass by his gates, hanging down their heads? Is it for thy glory, O God, that so large a shade of misery should be spread across thy works?—or, is it that we see but a part of them?—When the great chain at length is let down, and all that has held the two worlds in harmony is seen;—when the dawn of that day approaches, in which all the distressful incidents of this drama shall be unravelled;—when every man's case shall be reconsidered,—then wilt thou be fully justified in all thy ways, and every mouth shall be stopped.

After a long day of mercy mispent in riot and uncharitableness, the rich man died also :—the parable adds,—and was buried :—buried no doubt in triumph, with all the ill-timed pride of funerals, and empty decorations, which worldly folly is apt to prostitute upon those occasions.

But this was the last vain show ; the utter conclusion of all his epicurean grandeur :—the next is a scene of horror, where he is represented by our Saviour in a state of the utmost misery, from whence he is supposed to lift up his eyes towards Heaven, and cry to the patriarch Abraham for mercy.—"And Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in "thy life time receivedst thy good things."

——That he had received his good things,—'twas from Heaven,—and could be no reproach. With what severity soever the scripture speaks against riches, it does not appear that the living or faring sumptuously every day was the crime objected to the rich man ; or that it is a real part of a vitious character : the case might be then as now ; his quality and station in the world might be supposed to be such, as not only to have justified his doing this, but, in general, to have required it, without any imputation of doing wrong ;—for differences of stations there must be in the world,—which must be supported by such marks of distinction as custom imposes. The exceeding great plenty and magnificence in which Solomon is described to have lived, who had ten fat oxen, and twenty oxen out of the pastures, and a hundred sheep, besides harts and roe-bucks, and fallow deer and fatted fowl, with thirty measures of fine flour, and threescore measures of meal, for the daily provision of his table ;—

all this is not laid to him as a sin, but rather remarked as an instance of God's blessing to him ;—and whenever these things are otherwise, 'tis from a wasteful and dishonest perversion of them to pernicious ends,—and oft-times, to the very opposite ones for which they were granted,—to glad the heart, to open it, and render it more kind.—

And this seems to have been the snare the rich man had fallen into ;—and possibly, had he fared less sumptuously,—he might have had more cool hours for reflection, and been better disposed to have conceived an idea of want, and to have felt compassion for it.

" And Abraham said, Son, remember that thou " in thy life-time receivedst thy good things, and " likewise Lazarus evil things."——Remember ! sad subject of recollection ! that a man has passed through this world with all the blessings and advantages of it on his side,—favoured by God Almighty with riches,—befriended by his fellow-creatures in the means of acquiring them,—assisted every hour by the society of which he is a member, in the enjoyment of them,—to remember how much he has received,—how little he has bestowed !—that he has been no man's friend !—no one's protector !—no one's benefactor !—blessed God !

Thus begging in vain for himself, he is represented at last as interceding for his brethren, that Lazarus might be sent to them to give them warning, and save them from the ruin which he had fallen into ;—" They have Moses and the prophets," was the answer of the patriarch ;—" let them hear " them ;" but the unhappy man is represented as discontented with it, and still persisting in his re-

quest, and urging,—" Nay, father Abraham, but if " one went from the dead, they would repent."

—He thought so ;—but Abraham knew otherwise ;—and the grounds of the determination I have explained already ;—so shall proceed to draw some other conclusions and lessons from the parable.

And first, our Saviour might further intend to discover to us by it, the dangers to which great riches naturally expose mankind ; agreeably to what is elsewhere declared, how hardly shall they who have them enter into the kingdom of heaven.

The truth is, they are often too dangerous a blessing for God to trust us with, or we to manage : they surround us at all times with ease, with nonsense, with flattery, and false friends, with which thousands and ten thousands have perished :—they are apt to multiply our faults, and treacherously to conceal them from us :—they hourly administer to our temptations ;—and neither allow us time to examine our faults, nor humility to repent of them.—Nay, what is strange, do they not often tempt men even to covetousness ! and though amidst all the ill offices which riches do us, one would least suspect this vice, but rather think the one a cure for the other,—yet, so it is, that many a man contracts his spirits upon the enlargement of his fortune, and is the more empty for being full.

But there is less need to preach against this. We seem all to be hastening to the opposite extreme of luxury and expense : we generally content ourselves with the solution of it ; and say, 'Tis a natural consequence of trade and riches ;—and there it ends.

By the way, I affirm, there is a mistake in the ac-

count; and that it is not riches which are the cause of luxury,—but the corrupt calculation of the world, in making riches the balance for honour, for virtue, and for every thing that is great and good; which goads so many thousands on with an affection of possessing more than they have;—and, consequently, of engaging in a system of expenses they cannot support.

In one word, 'tis the necessity of *appearing* to be somebody, in order to be so,—which ruins the world.

This leads us to another lesson in the parable, concerning the true use and application of riches: we may be sure, from the treatment of the rich man, that he did not employ those talents as God intended.

How God did intend them,—may as well be known from an appeal to your own hearts, and the inscription you shall read there,—as from any chapter and verse I might cite upon the subject. Let us then for a moment, my dear auditors, turn our eyes that way, and consider the traces which even the most insensible man may have proof of, from what he may perceive springing up within him from some casual act of generosity; and though this is a pleasure which properly belongs to the good, yet let him try the experiment;—let him comfort the captive, or cover the naked with a garment, and he will feel what is meant by that moral delight arising in the mind from the conscience of a humane action.

But to know it right, we must call upon the compassionate.—Cruelty gives evidence unwillingly, and feels the pleasure but imperfectly; for this, like all other pleasures, is of a relative nature, and

consequently the enjoyment of it requires some qualification in the faculty, as much as the enjoyment of any other good does.—There must be something antecedent in the disposition and temper which will render that good,—a good to that individual,—otherwise, though 'tis true it may be possessed,—yet it never can be enjoyed.

Consider how difficult you will find it, to convince a miserable heart that any thing is good which is not profitable! or a libertine one, that thing is bad which is pleasant!

Preach to a voluptuary, who has modell'd both mind and body to no other happiness but good eating and drinking,—bid him "taste and see how good God is,"—there is not an invitation in all nature would confound him like it.

In a word, a man's mind must be like your proposition before it can be relished:—and 'tis the resemblance between them which brings over his judgment, and makes him an evidence on your side.

'Tis therefore not to the cruel,—'tis to the merciful;—to those who rejoice with them that rejoice, and weep with them that weep,—that we make this appeal.—'Tis to the generous, the kind, the humane, that I am now to tell the sad *story of the fatherless, and of him who hath no helper, and bespeak your almsgiving in behalf of those who know not how to ask for it themselves.

—What can I say more?—It is a subject on which I cannot inform your judgment;—and, in such an audience, I would not presume to practise upon your passions:—let it suffice to say, That they

* Charity sermon at St. Andrew's, Holborn.

whom God hath blessed with the means,—and for whom he has done more, in blessing them likewise with a disposition,—have abundant reason to be thankful to him, as the author of every good gift, for the measure he hath bestowed to them of both. 'Tis the refuge against the stormy wind and tempest, which he has planted in our hearts; and the constant fluctuation of every thing in this world, forces all the sons and daughters of Adam to seek shelter under it by turns. Guard it by entails and settlements as we will, the most affluent plenty may be stripp'd, and find all its worldly comforts, like so many withered leaves dropping from us !—The crowns of princes may be shaken; and the greatest that ever awed the world, have looked back and moralized upon the turn of the wheel !

That which has happened to one,—may happen to every man: and therefore that excellent rule of our Saviour, in acts of benevolence, as well as every thing else, should govern us;—"That whatsoever "ye would that men should do to you, do ye also "unto them."

Hast thou ever lain upon the bed of languishing? or laboured under a distemper which threatened thy life?—Call to mind thy sorrowful and pensive spirit at that time, and say, What it was that made the thoughts of death so bitter !—If thou hadst children,—I affirm it, the bitterness of death lay there ! —If unbrought up, and unprovided for, What will become of them? Where will they find a friend when I am gone? Who will stand up for them, and plead their cause against the wicked?

—Blessed God ! to thee, who art a father to the fatherless, and a husband to the widow,—I intrust them !

Hast thou ever sustained any considerable shock in thy fortune? or, Has the scantiness of thy condition hurried thee into great straits, and brought thee almost to distraction? Consider, who was it that spread a table in that wilderness of thought?—who made thy cup to overflow? Was it not a friend of consolation who stepped in,—saw thee embarrassed with the tender pledges of thy love, and the partner of thy cares,—took them under his protection?—(Heaven! thou wilt reward him for it!)—and freed thee from all the terrifying apprehensions of a parent's love?

—Hast thou?—

—But how shall I ask a question which must bring tears into so many eyes?—Hast thou ever been wounded in a more affecting manner still, by the loss of a most obliging friend?—or been torn away from the embraces of a dear and promising child by the stroke of death?—Bitter remembrance! Nature droops at it;—but nature is the same in all conditions and lots of life.—A child thrust forth in an evil hour, without food, without raiment, bereft of instruction, and the means of its salvation, is a subject of more tender heart-aches, and will awaken every power of nature!—As we have felt for ourselves,—let us feel for Christ's sake;—let us feel for theirs; and may the God of all comfort bless you! Amen.

SERMON XXIV.

PRIDE.

LUKE XIV. 10, 11.

But thou, when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room, that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say to thee, Friend, go up higher; then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them who sit at meat with thee; for whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

It is an exhortation of our Saviour's to humility, addressed, by way of inference, from what he had said in the three foregoing verses of the chapter; where, upon entering into the house of one of the chief pharisees to eat bread, and marking how small a portion of this necessary virtue entered in with the several guests, discovering itself from their choosing the chief rooms, and most distinguished places of honour,—he takes the occasion which such a behaviour offered, to caution them against pride; —states the inconvenience of the passion,—shews the disappointments which attend it,—the disgrace in which it generally ends, in being forced at last to recede from the pretensions to what is more than our due; which, by the way, is the very thing the passion is eternally prompting us to expect. When, therefore, thou art bidden to a wedding, says our Saviour, sit not down in the highest room, lest a more honourable man than thou be bidden of him; and he that bade thee and him, come and say to thee,

—Give this man place ; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room.

—But thou, when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room.—Hard lecture ! In the lowest room ?—What !—do I owe nothing to myself? Must I forget my station, my character in life ? Resign the precedence which my birth, my fortune, my talents, have already placed me in possession of? —give all up ! and suffer inferiors to take my honours ? Yes ;—for that, says our Saviour, is the road to it : " For when he that bade thee cometh, he will " say to thee, Friend, go up higher ; then shalt thou " have worship in the presence of them who sit at " meat with thee :—for whosoever exalteth himself " shall be abased ; and he that humbleth himself " shall be exalted."

To make good the truth of which declaration, it is not necessary we should look beyond this life, and say, That in the day of retribution, wherein every high thing shall be brought low, and every irregular passion dealt with as it deserves,—that pride, amongst the rest (considered as a vitious character) shall meet with its proper punishment of being abased, and lying down forever in shame and dishonour. —It is not necessary we should look so far forwards for the accomplishment of this : the words seem not so much to imply the threat of a distant punishment, the execution of which was to be respited to that day,—as the declaration of a plain truth depending upon the natural course of things, and evidently verified in every hour's commerce of the world ; from whence, as well as from our reasoning upon the point, it is found, that pride lays us open to so many mortifying encounters, which humility, in its own

nature, rests secure from,—that verily, each of them, in this world, have their reward faithfully dealt out by the natural workings of men's passions; —which, though very bad executioners in general, yet are so far just ones in this, that they seldom suffer the exultations of an insolent temper to escape the abasement, or the deportment of a humble one to fail of the honour which each of their characters do deserve.

In other vitious excesses which a man commits, the world (though it is not much to its credit) seems to stand pretty neuter. If you are extravagant or intemperate, you are looked upon as the greatest enemy to yourself;—or, if an enemy to the publick, at least, you are so remote a one to each individual, that no one feels himself immediately concerned in your punishment: but, in the instances of pride, the attack is personal; for, as this passion can only take its rise from a secret comparison, which the party has been making of himself to my disadvantage, every intimation he gives me of what he thinks of the matter, is so far a direct injury, either as it withholds the respect which is my due,—or, perhaps, denies me to have any; or else, which presses equally hard, as it puts me in mind of the defects which I really have, and of which I am truly conscious, and, consequently, think myself the less deserving of an admonition: in every one of which cases, the proud man, in whatever language he speaks it,—if it is expressive of this superiority over me, either in the gifts of fortune, the advantages of birth or improvements, as it has proceeded from a mean estimation, and possibly a very unfair one, of the like pretensions in myself,—the attack, I say, is personal, and has generally the fate to be felt and resented as such.

So that, with regard to the present inconveniences, there is scarce any vice, bating such as are immediately punished by laws, which a man may not indulge with more safety to himself than this one of pride,—the humblest of men not being so entirely void of the passion themselves, but that they suffer so much from the overflowings of it in others, as to make the literal accomplishment of the text a common interest and concern; in which they are generally successful,—the nature of the vice being such, as not only to tempt you to it, but to afford the occasions itself of its own humiliation.

The proud man,—see!—he is sore all over; touch him,—you put him to pain; and though, of all others, he acts as if every mortal was void of all sense and feeling, yet is possessed with so nice and exquisite a one himself, that the slights, the little neglects and instances of disesteem, which would be scarce felt by another man, are perpetually wounding him, and oft-times piercing him to his very heart.

I would not, therefore, be a proud man, was it only for this, that it should not be in the power of every one who thought fit to chastise me:—my other infirmities, however unworthy of me, at least will not incommode me;—so little discountenance do I see given to them, that it is not the world's fault if I suffer by them:—but here,—if I exalt myself, I have no prospect of escaping;—with this vice I stand swoln up in every body's way, and must unavoidably be thrust back. Whichever way I turn, whatever step I take under the direction of this passion, I press unkindly upon some one; and, in return, must prepare myself for such mortifying re-

pulses as will bring me down, and make me go on my way sorrowing.

This is from the nature of things, and the experience of life as far back as Solomon, whose observation upon it was the same,—and it will ever hold good, "that before honour was humility, and a haughty spirit before a fall:—put not therefore thyself "forth in the presence of the king, and stand not in "the place of great men:—for better is it"—(which, by the way, is the very dissuasive in the text)—"better is it that it be said unto thee, Friend, come "up higher, than that thou shouldst be put lower "in the presence of the prince whom thine eyes "have seen."

Thus much for the illustration of this one argument of our Saviour's against pride.—There are many other considerations which expose the weakness of it, which his knowledge of the heart of man might have suggested; but, as the particular occasion which gave rise to this lecture of our Saviour's against pride, naturally led him to speak of the mortifications which attend such instances of it as he then beheld,—for this reason, the other arguments might be omitted, which perhaps, in a set discourse, would be doing injustice to the subject. I shall, therefore, in the remaining part of this, beg leave to offer some other considerations, of a moral as well as a religious nature, upon this subject, as so many inducements to check this weak passion in man, which, though one of the most convenient of his infirmities,—the most painful and discourteous to society, yet, by a sad fatality, so it is, that there are few vices, except such whose temptations are immediately seated in our natures, to which there is so general a propensity throughout the whole race.

This had led some satirical pens to write, That all mankind, at the bottom, were proud alike;—that one man differed from another not so much in the different portions which he possessed of it, as in the different art and address by which he excels in the management and disguise of it to the world: we trample, no doubt, too often upon the pride of Plato's mantle, with as great a pride of our own; yet, on the whole, the remark has more spleen than truth in it, there being thousands (if any evidence is to be allowed) of the most unaffected humility, and truest poverty of spirit, which actions can give proof of. Notwithstanding this, so much may be allowed to the observation, That pride is a vice which grows up in society so insensibly,—steals in unobserved upon the heart upon so many occasions,—forms itself upon such strange pretensions, and, when it has done, veils itself under such a variety of unsuspected appearances,—sometimes even under that of humility itself;—in all which cases, self-love, like a false friend, instead of checking, most treacherously feeds this humour,—points out some excellence in every soul to make him vain, and think more highly of himself than he ought to think;—that, upon the whole, there is no one weakness into which the heart of man is more easily betrayed,—or which requires greater helps of good sense and good principles to guard against.

And, first, the root from which it springs is no inconsiderable discredit to the fruit.

If you look into the best moral writers, who have taken pains to search into the grounds of this passion,—they will tell you, that pride is the vice of little and contracted souls;—that, whatever affecta-

tion of greatness it generally wears and carries in the looks, there is always meanness in the heart of it :—a haughty and an abject temper, I believe, are much nearer a-kin than they will acknowledge ;—like poor relations, they look a little shy at one another at first sight ; but, trace back their pedigree, they are but collateral branches from the same stem ; and there is scarce any one who has not seen many such instances of it, as one of our poets alludes to, in that admirable stroke he has given of this affinity, in his description of a " Pride which licks the dust."

As it has meanness at the bottom of it,—so it is justly charged with having weakness there too ; of which it gives the strongest proof in regard to the chief end it has in view, and the absurd means it takes to bring it about.

Consider a moment :—What is it the proud man aims at !—why,—such a measure of respect and deference, as is due to his superior merit, &c. &c.

Now, good sense and a knowledge of the world shew us, that how much soever of these are due to a man, allowing he has made a right calculation,—they are still dues of such a nature, that they are not to be insisted upon : honour and respect must be a free-will offering : treat them otherwise, and claim them from the world as a tax,—they are sure to be withheld ; the first discovery of such an expectation disappoints it, and prejudices your title to it forever.

To this speculative argument of its weakness, it has generally the ill fate to add another of a more substantial nature, which is matter of fact : That to turn giddy upon every little exaltation, is experienced to be no less a mark of a weak brain in the

figurative, than it is in the literal sense of the expression :—in sober truth, 'tis but a scurvy kind of a trick, *(quoties voluit Fortuna jocari)*—when fortune, in one of her merry moods, takes a poor devil with this passion in his head, and mounts him up all at once as high as she can get him ;—for it is sure to make him play such phantastick tricks, as to become the very fool of the comedy ; and was he not a general benefactor to the world in making it merry, I know not how spleen could be pacified during the representation.

A third argument against pride, is the natural connection it has with vices of an unsocial aspect : the scripture seldom introduces it alone.—Anger, or strife, or revenge, or some inimical passion, is ever upon the stage with it ; the proofs and reasons of which I have not time to enlarge on, and therefore shall say no more upon this argument than this,—That was there no other,—yet the bad company this vice is generally found in, would be sufficient by itself to engage a man to avoid it.

Thus much for the moral considerations upon this subject ; a great part of which, as they illustrate chiefly the inconveniences of pride in a social light, may seem to have a greater tendency to make men guard the appearances of it, than conquer the passion itself, and root it out of their nature. To do this effectually, we must add the arguments of religion ; without which, the best moral discourse may prove little better than a cold political lecture, taught merely to govern the passion so, as not to be injurious to a man's present interest or quiet ; all which a man may learn to practise well enough, and yet at the same time be a perfect stranger to the best part of

humility, which implies not a concealment of pride, but an absolute conquest over the first risings of it which are felt in the heart of man.

And, first, one of the most persuasive arguments which religion offers to this end, is that which arises from the state and condition of ourselves, both as to our natural and moral imperfections. It is impossible to reflect a moment upon this hint, but with a heart full of the humble exclamation, "O God! "what is man!—even a thing of nought!"—a poor, infirm, miserable, short-lived creature, that passes away like a shadow, and is hastening off the stage where the theatrical titles and distinctions, and the whole mask of pride which he has worn for a day will fall off, and leave him naked as a neglected slave! Send forth your imagination, I beseech you, to view the last scene of the greatest and proudest who ever awed and governed the world,—see the empty vapour disappearing! one of the arrows of mortality this moment sticks fast within him! see! —it forces out his life, and freezes his blood and spirits!

—Approach his bed of state,—lift up the curtain, —regard a moment with silence.—

—Are these cold hands and pale lips all that is left of him who was canonized by his own pride, or made a god of by his flatterers?

O my soul! with what dreams hast thou been bewitched! how hast thou been deluded by the objects thou hast so eagerly grasped at!

If this reflection from the natural imperfection of man, which he cannot remedy, does nevertheless strike a damp upon human pride, much more must the considerations do so which arise from the wilful depravations of his nature!

Survey yourselves, my dear christians, a few moments in this light!—behold a disobedient, ungrateful, intractable, and disorderly set of creatures, going wrong seven times in a day,—acting sometimes every hour of it against your own convictions,—your own interests, and the intentions of your God, who wills and proposes nothing but your happiness and prosperity,—what reason does this view furnish you for pride? How many does it suggest to mortify and make you ashamed?—Well might the son of Sirach say in that sarcastical remark of his upon it,—'That pride was not made 'for man;'—for some purposes, and for some particular beings, the passion might have been shaped;—but not for him.—Fancy it where you will, 'tis no where so improper,—'tis in no creature so unbecoming.—

—But why so cold an assent to so incontested a truth?—Perhaps thou hast reasons to be proud:—for Heaven's sake, let us hear them.—Thou hast the advantages of birth and title to boast of,—or thou standest in the sunshine of court-favour,—or thou hast a large fortune,—or great talents,—or much learning,—or nature has bestowed her graces upon thy person;—speak,—on which of these foundations hast thou raised this fanciful structure?—Let us examine them.

Thou art well-born:—then trust me, 'twill pollute no one drop of thy blood to be humble: humility calls no man down from his rank,—divests not princes of their titles; it is in life what the *clear obscure* is in painting; it makes the hero step forth in the canvas, and detaches his figure from the group in which he would otherwise stand confounded forever.

If thou art rich,—then shew the greatness of thy fortune,—or, what is better, the greatness of thy soul in the meekness of thy conversation; condescend to men of low estate,—support the distressed, and patronize the neglected.—Be great; but let it be in considering riches as they are; as "talents committed to an earthen vessel:"—that thou art but the receiver;—and that to be obliged, and to be vain too,—is but the old solecism of pride and beggary, which, though they often meet,—yet ever make but an absurd society.

If thou art powerful in interest, and standest deified by a servile tribe of dependants,—why shouldest thou be proud—because they are hungry?—Scourge me such sycophants: they have turned the heads of thousands as well as thine.—

—But 'tis thy own dexterity and strength which have gained thee this eminence:—allow it:—but art thou proud that thou standest in a place where thou art the mark of one man's envy, another man's malice, or a third man's revenge?—where good men may be ready to suspect thee, and whence bad men will be ready to pull thee down?—I would be proud of nothing that is uncertain. Haman was so, because he was admitted alone to queen Esther's banquet; and the distinction raised him;—but it was fifty cubits higher than he ever dreamt or thought of.

Let us pass on to the pretences of learning, &c. &c. If thou hast a little, thou wilt be proud of it in course: if thou hast much, and good sense along with it, there will be no reason to dispute against the passion: a beggarly parade of remnants is but a sorry object of pride at the best;—but more so

when we can cry out upon it, as the poor man did of his hatchet,—" Alas ! Master,—for it was borrowed."*

It is treason to say the same of beauty,—whatever we do of the arts and ornaments with which pride is wont to set it off: the weakest minds are most caught with both; being ever glad to win attention and credit from small and slender accidents, —through disability of purchasing them by better means. In truth, beauty has so many charms, one knows not how to speak against it; and when it happens that a graceful figure is the habitation of a virtuous soul; when the beauty of the face speaks out the modesty and humility of the mind, and the justness of the proportion raises our thoughts up to the art and wisdom of the great Creator, something may be allowed it,—and something to the embellishments which set it off;—and yet, when the whole apology is read,—it will be found at last, that beauty, like truth, never is so glorious as when it goes the plainest.

Simplicity is the great friend to nature; and if I would be proud of any thing in this silly world, it should be of this honest alliance.

Consider what has been said; and may the God of all mercies and kindness watch over your passions, and inspire you " with all humbleness of " mind, meekness, patience, and long-suffering." Amen.

* 2 Kings vi. 7.

SERMON XXV.

HUMILITY.

MATTHEW XI. 29.

Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

The great business of man, is the regulation of his spirit! the possession of such a frame and temper of mind as will lead us peaceably through this world, and in the many weary stages of it, afford us what we shall be sure to stand in need of,—"Rest "unto our souls."

—Rest unto our souls!—'tis all we want,—the end of all our wishes and pursuits: give us a prospect of this, we take the wings of the morning, and fly to the uttermost parts of the earth to have it in possession: we seek for it in titles, in riches, and pleasures;—climb up after it by ambition;—come down again and stoop for it by avarice;—try all extremes; still we are gone out of the way; nor is it till after many miserable experiments that we are convinced at last we have been seeking every where for it but where there is a prospect of finding it; and that is, within ourselves, in a meek and lowly disposition of heart. This, and this only, will give us rest unto our souls:—rest from those turbulent and haughty passions which disturb our quiet;—rest from the provocations and disappointments of the world, and a train of untold evils too long to be

recounted; against all which this frame and preparation of mind is the best protection.

I beg you will go along with me in this argument. Consider how great a share of the uneasinesses which take up and torment our thoughts, owe their rise to nothing else but the dispositions of mind which are opposite to this character.

With regard to the provocations and offences which are unavoidably happening to a man in his commerce with the world,—take it as a rule,—as a man's pride is,—so is always his displeasure;—as the opinion of himself rises,—so does the injury,—so does his resentment: 'tis this which gives edge and force to the instrument which has struck him,—and excites that heat in the wound which renders it incurable.

See how different the case is with the humble man: one half of these painful conflicts he actually escapes; the other part falls lightly on him:—he provokes no man by contempt; thrusts himself forward as the mark of no man's envy: so that he cuts off the first fretful occasions of the greatest part of these evils: and for those in which the passions of others would involve him, like the humble shrubs in the valley, gently gives way, and scarce feels the injury of those stormy encounters which rend the proud cedar, and tear it up by its roots.

If you consider it with regard to the many disappointments of this life, which arise from the hopes of bettering our condition, and advancing in the world,—the reasoning is the same.

What we expect—is ever in proportion to the estimate made of ourselves; when pride and self-love have brought us in their account of this matter,—

we find, that we are worthy of all honours,—fit for all places and employments :—as our expectations rise and multiply, so must our disappointments with them; and there needs nothing more to lay the foundation of our unhappiness, and both to make and keep us miserable. And in truth there is nothing so common in life as to see thousands, who, you would say, had all the reason in the world to be at rest, so torn up and disquieted with sorrows of this class, and so incessantly tortured with the disappointments which their pride and passions have created for them, that though they appear to have all the ingredients of happiness in their hands,—they can neither compound nor use them !—How should they ? the goad is ever in their sides, and so hurries them on from one expectation to another, as to leave them no rest day nor night.

Humility, therefore, recommends itself as a security against these heart-aches ; which, tho' ridiculous sometimes in the eye of the beholder, yet are serious enough to the man who suffers them; and I believe would make no inconsiderable account in a true catalogue of the disquietudes of mortal man. Against these, I say, humility is the best defence.

He that is little in his own eyes, is little too in his desires, and consequently moderate in his pursuit of them : like another man, he may fail in his attempts, and lose the point he aimed at,—but that is all,—he loses not himself,—he loses not his happiness and peace of mind with it;—even the contentions of the humble man are mild and placid.—Blessed character ! When such a one is thrust back, who does not pity him !—When he falls, who would not stretch out a hand to raise him up !

And here, I cannot help stopping in the midst of this argument, to make a short observation, which is this :—When we reflect upon the character of humility,—we are apt to think it stands the most naked and defenceless of all virtues whatever,—the least able to support its claims against the insolent antagonist who seems ready to bear him down, and all opposition which such a temper can make.

Now, if we consider him as standing alone,—no doubt, in such a case he will be overpowered and trampled upon by his opposer ;—but if we consider the meek and lowly man as he is,—fenced and guarded by the love, the friendship, and wishes of all mankind ;— that the other stands alone, hated, discountenanced, without one true friend or hearty well-wisher on his side :—when this is balanced, we shall have reason to change our opinion, and be convinced that the humble man, strengthened with such an alliance, is far from being so over-matched as at first sight he may appear :—nay, I believe, one might venture to go further, and engage for it, that in all such cases, where real fortitude and true personal courage were wanted, he is much more likely to give proof of it ; and I would sooner look for it in such a temper than in that of his adversary. Pride may make a man violent,—but humility will make him firm :—and which of the two do you think likely to come off with honour ?—he who acts from the changeable impulse of heated blood, and follows the uncertain motions of his pride and fury ?—or the man who stands cool and collected in himself ; who governs his resentments, instead of being governed by them, and on every occasion acts upon the steady motives of principle and duty ?

But this by the way,—though, in truth, it falls in with the main argument; for if the observation is just, and humility has the advantages where we should least expect them, the argument rises higher in behalf of those which are more apparently on its side:—in all which, if the humble man finds what the proud man must never hope for in this world,—that is, "rest to his soul,"—so does he likewise meet with it from the influence such a temper has upon his condition under the evils of his life, not as changeable upon the vices of men, but as the portion of his inheritance by the appointment of God: for if, as Job says, we are born to trouble as the sparks fly upwards, surely it is he who thinks the greatest of these troubles below his sins,—and the smallest favours above his merit, that is likely to suffer the least from the one, and enjoy the most from the other. 'Tis he who possesses his soul in meekness, and keeps it subjected to all the issues of fortune, that is the farthest out of their reach.—No;—he blames not the sun, though it does not ripen his vine,—nor blusters at the winds, though they bring him no profit.—If the fountain of the humble man rises not as high as he could wish,—he thinks, however, that it rises as high as it ought; and as the laws of nature still do their duty, that he has no cause to complain against them.

If disappointed of riches,—he knows the providence of God is not his debtor; that though he has received less than others, yet, as he thinks himself less than the least, he has reason to be thankful.

If the world goes untoward with the humble man in other respects,—he knows a truth which the proud man does never acknowledge, and that is,

that the world was not made for him; and, therefore, how little share soever he has of its advantages, he sees an argument of content in reflecting how little it is that a compound of sin, of ignorance, and frailty, has grounds to expect.

A soul thus turned and resigned, is carried smoothly down the stream of Providence; no temptations in his passage disquiet him with desire;—no dangers alarm him with fear. Though open to all the changes and chances of others,—yet, by seeing the justice of what happens,—and humbly giving way to the blow,—though he is smitten, he is not smitten like other men, nor feels the smart which they do.

Thus much for the doctrine of humility:—let us now look towards the example of it.

It is observed by some one, that as pride was the passion through which sin and misery entered into the world, and gave our enemy the triumph of ruining our nature, that therefore the Son of God, who came to seek and to save that which was lost, when he entered upon the work of our restoration, he began at the very point where he knew we had failed; and this he did by endeavouring to bring the soul of man back to its original temper of humility; so that his first publick address from the Mount began with a declaration of blessedness to the poor in spirit;—and almost his last exhortation in the text, was to copy the fair original he had set them of this virtue, and "to learn of him to be meek and lowly "in heart."

It is the most unanswerable appeal that can be made to the heart of man; and so persuasive and accommodated to all Christians, that, as much pride

as there is still in the world, it is not credible but that every believer must receive some tincture of this character or bias towards it, from the example of so great, and yet so humble a Master, whose whole course of life was a particular lecture to this one virtue; and, in every instance of it, shewed that he came not to share the pride and glories of life, or swell the hopes of ambitious followers, but to cast a damp upon them forever, by appearing himself rather as a servant than a master,—coming, as he continually declared, not to be ministered unto, but to minister; and, as the prophet had foretold in that mournful description of him,—to have no form or comeliness, nor any beauty, that they should desire him. The voluntary meanness of his birth,—the poverty of his life,—the low offices in which it was engaged, in preaching the gospel to the poor,—the inconveniences which attended the execution of it, in having nowhere to lay his head, —all spoke the same language.—That the God of truth should submit to the suspicion of an imposture:—his humble deportment under that, and a thousand provocations of a thankless people, still raises his character higher;—and what exalts it to its highest pitch,—is the tender and pathetick proof he gave of the same disposition at the conclusion and great catastrophe of his sufferings,—when a life full of so many instances of humility was crowned with the most endearing one of "humbling him-"self even to the death of the cross;"—the death of a slave, a malefactor,—dragged to Calvary without opposition,—insulted without complaint!

—Blessed Jesus! How can the man who calls upon thy name, but learn of thee to be meek and lowly

in heart!—How can he but profit when such a lesson was seconded by such an example!

If humility shines so bright in the character of Christ, so does it in that of his religion; the true spirit of which tends all the same way.—Christianity, when rightly explained and practised, is all meekness and candour, and love and courtesy: and there is no one passion our Saviour rebukes so often, or with so much sharpness, as that one, which is subversive of these kind effects,—and that is pride; which, in proportion as it governs us, necessarily leads us on to a discourteous opinion and treatment of others.—I say *necessarily*,—because 'tis a natural consequence; and the progress from the one to the other is unavoidable.

This our Saviour often remarks in the character of the pharisees:—they trusted in themselves;—'twas no wonder then they despised others.

This, I believe, might principally relate to spiritual pride; which, by the way, is the worst of all pride: and as it is a very bad passion, I cannot do better than conclude the discourse with some remarks upon it.

In most conceits of a religious superiority, there has usually gone hand in hand with it another fancy, which, I suppose, has fed it;—and that is, a persuasion of some more than ordinary aids and illuminations from above.—Let us examine this matter.

That the influence and assistance of God's spirit,—in a way imperceptible to us, do enable us to render him an acceptable service, we learn from scripture.—In what particular manner this is effected, so that the act shall still be imputed ours,—the scripture says not:—we know only the account is

so; but as for any sensible demonstrations of its workings to be felt as such within us,—the word of God is utterly silent; nor can that silence be supplied by any experience.—We have none; unless you call the false pretences to it such,—suggested by an enthusiastick or distempered fancy. As expressly as we are told and pray for the inspiration of God's Spirit, there are no boundaries fixed, nor can any be ever marked, to distinguish them from the efforts and determinations of our own reason; and, as firmly as most Christians believe the effects of them upon their hearts, I may venture to affirm, that since the promises were made, there never was a Christian of a cool head and sound judgment, that, in any instance of a change of life, would presume to say which part of his reformation was owing to divine help;—nor which to the operations of his own mind;—nor who, upon looking back, would pretend to strike the line, and say, 'here it was that my own reflections ended;'—and, 'at this point the suggestions of the Spirit of God began to take place.'

However backward the world has been in former ages in the discovery of such points as God never meant us to know,—we have been more successful in our own days:—thousands can trace out now the impressions of this divine intercourse in themselves, from the first moment they received it, and with such distinct intelligence of its progress and workings, as to require no evidence of its truth.

It must be owned, that the present age has not altogether the honour of this discovery;—there were too many grounds given to improve on the religious cant of the last century;—when the *in-comings*,

in-dwellings, and *out-lettings* of the Spirit were the subjects of so much edification; and when, as they do now, the most illiterate mechanicks, who, as a witty divine said of them, were much fitter to *make* a pulpit than to get into one, were yet able so to frame their nonsense to the nonsense of the times, as to beget an opinion in their followers, not only that they pray'd and preach'd by inspiration, but that the most common actions of their lives were set about in the Spirit of the Lord.

The tenets of the Quakers (a harmless, quiet people) are collateral descendants from the same enthusiastick original; and their accounts and way of reasoning upon their inward light and spiritual worship, are much the same; which last they carry thus much further, as to believe the Holy Ghost comes down upon their assemblies, and *moves* them, without regard to condition or sex, to make intercessions with unutterable groans.

So that, in fact, the opinions of Methodists, upon which I was first entering, is but a republication, with some alterations, of the same extravagant conceits; and as enthusiasm generally speaks the same language in all ages, 'tis but too sadly verified in this; for though we have not yet got to the old terms of the in-comings and in-dwellings of the Spirit,—yet we have arrived at the first feelings of its entrance, recorded with as particular an exactness as an act of filiation;—so that numbers will tell you the identical place,—the day of the month,—and the hour of the night, when the Spirit came in upon them, and took possession of their hearts.

Now there is this inconvenience on our side, That there is no arguing with a frenzy of this kind: for

unless a representation of the case be a confutation of its folly to them, they must forever be led captive by a delusion, from which no reasoner can redeem them: for if you should inquire upon what evidence so strange a persuasion is grounded?—they will tell you, 'They feel it is so.'—If you reply, That this is no conviction to you, who do not feel it like them, and, therefore, would wish to be satisfied by what tokens they are able to distinguish such emotions from those of fancy and complexion,—they will answer, that the manner of it is incommunicable by human language, but 'tis a matter of fact;—they feel its operation as plain and distinct as the natural sensations of pleasure, or the pains of a disorder'd body:—and since I have mentioned a disorder'd body, I cannot help suggesting, that amongst the more serious and deluded of this sect, 'tis much to be doubted, whether a disorder'd body has not oft-times as great a share in letting in these conceits as a disorder'd mind.

When a poor disconsolated drooping creature is terrified from all enjoyment,—prays without ceasing, till his imagination is heated,—fasts, and mortifies, and mopes, till his body is in as bad a plight as his mind,—is it a wonder that the mechanical disturbances and conflicts of an empty belly, interpreted by an empty head, should be mistook for workings of a different kind from what they are?—or, that in such a situation, where the mind sits upon the watch for extraordinary occurrences, and the imagination is pre-engaged on its side, is it strange if every commotion should help to fix him in this malady, and make him a fitter subject for the treatment of a physician than a divine?

In many cases, they seem so much above the skill of either, that unless God in his mercy rebuke this lying spirit, and call it back,—it may go on, and persuade millions to their destruction.

SERMON XXVI.

ADVANTAGES OF CHRISTIANITY TO THE WORLD.

ROM. I. 22.

Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.

THERE is no one project to which the whole race of mankind is so universally a bubble, as to that of being thought wise: and the affectation of it is so visible, in men of all complexions, that you every day see some one or other so very solicitous to establish the character, as not to allow him self leisure to do the things which fairly win it;—expending more art and stratagem to appear so in the eyes of the world, than would suffice to make him so in truth.

It is owing to the force of this desire, that you see, in general, there is no injury touches a man so sensibly, as an insult upon his parts and capacity. Tell a man of other defects? that he wants learning, industry, or application,—he will hear your reproof with patience.—Nay, you may go further: take him in a proper season, you may tax his morals,—you may tell him he is irregular in his conduct,—passionate or revengeful in his nature,—loose in his principles?—deliver it with the gentleness of a friend,—possible, he'll not only bear with you,—but, if ingenuous, he will thank you for your lecture, and promise a reformation.—But hint,—hint but at a de-

fect in his intellectuals,—touch but that sore place, —from that moment you are look'd upon as an enemy sent to torment him before his time ; and, in return may reckon upon his resentment and ill-will forever : so that, in general, you will find it safer to tell a man he is a knave than a fool ;—and stand a better chance of being forgiven for proving he has been wanting in a point of common honesty, than a point of common sense.

Strange souls that we are ! as if to live well was not the greatest argument of wisdom !—and, as if what reflected upon our morals, did not most of all reflect upon our understandings !

This, however, is a reflection we make a shift to overlook in the heat of this pursuit; and, though we all covet this great character of wisdom, there is scarce any point wherein we betray more folly than in our judgments concerning it; rarely bringing this precious ore either to the test or the balance ; and though 'tis of the last consequence not to be deceived in it,—we generally take it upon trust,—seldom suspect the quality, but never the quantity of what has fallen to our lot: so that, however inconsistent a man shall be in his opinions of this, and what absurd measures soever he takes in consequence of it, in the conduct of his life,—he still speaks comfort to his soul ; and, like Solomon, when he had least pretence for it,—in the midst of his nonsense will cry out and say,—" That all my wisdom remaineth with " me."

Where then is wisdom to be found ? and where is the place of understanding ?

The politicians of this world, " professing themselves wise,"—admit of no other claims of wisdom

but the knowledge of men and business,—the understanding the interests of states,—the intrigues of courts,—the finding out the passions and weaknesses of foreign ministers,—and turning them and all events to their country's glory and advantage.

—Not so the little man of this world, who thinks the main point of wisdom is to take care of himself;—to be wise in his generation ;—to make use of the opportunity whilst he has it, of raising a fortune, and heraldizing a name.—Far wide is the speculative and studious man (whose office is in the clouds) from such little ideas :—Wisdom dwells with him in finding out the secrets of nature ;—sounding the depths of arts and sciences ;—measuring the heavens ;—telling the number of the stars, and calling them all by their names : so that when in our busy imaginations we have built and unbuilt again "God's stories in the "heavens,"—and fancy we have found out the point whereon to fix the foundations of the earth; and, in the language of the book of Job, have searched out the corner-stone thereof, we think our titles to wisdom built upon the same basis with those of our knowledge, and that they will continue forever!

The mistake of these pretenders is shewn at large by the apostle, in the chapter from which the text is taken,—"Professing themselves wise ;"—in which expression (by the way) St. Paul is thought to allude to the vanity of the Greeks and Romans, who being great encouragers of arts and learning, which they had carried to extraordinary heights, considered all other nations as barbarians in respect of themselves; and, amongst whom, particularly the Greeks, the men of study and inquiry had assumed to themselves, with great indecorum, the title of the wise men.

With what parade and ostentation soever this was made out, it had the fate to be attended with one of the most mortifying abasements which could happen to wisdom; and that was an ignorance of those points which most concerned man to know.

This he shews from the general state of the Gentile world, in the great article of their misconceptions of the Deity;—and, as wrong notions produce wrong actions,—of the duties and services they owed to him, and, in course, of what they owed to one another.

For though, as he argues in the foregoing verses, —"The invisible things of him from the creation "of the world might be clearly seen and under- "stood, by the things that are made;"—that is,— Though God, by the clearest discovery of himself, had ever laid before mankind such evident proofs of his eternal being, his infinite powers and perfections,—so that what is to be known of his invisible nature might all along be traced by the marks of his goodness,—and the visible frame and order of the world,—yet so utterly were they without excuse, —that though they knew God, and saw his image and superscription in every part of his works,— "yet they glorified him not!"—So bad a use did they make of the powers given them from this great discovery, that, instead of adoring the Being thus manifested to them, in purity and truth, they fell into the most gross and absurd delusions:—"Chang- "ed the glory of the incorruptible God, into an "image made like unto corruptible men;—to birds, "—to four-footed beasts and creeping things!— "Professing themselves to be wise,—they became "fools."—All their specious wisdom was but a

more glittering kind of ignorance, and ended in the most dishonourable of all mistakes,—in setting up fictitious gods, to receive the tribute of their adoration and thanks.

The fountain of religion being thus poisoned, no wonder the stream shewed its effects, which are charged upon them in the following words, where he describes the heathen world "as full of all un-"righteousness,"—fornication,—covetousness,—maliciousness,—full of murder,—envy,—debate,—malignity,—whisperers,—backbiters,—haters of God,—proud,—boasters,—inventors of evil things,—disobedient to parents,—without understanding,—without natural affection,—implacable,—unmerciful!—God in heaven defend us from such a catalogue!

But these disorders, if fairly considered, you'll say, have in no ages arisen so much from want of light, as a want of disposition to follow the light which God has ever imparted: that the law written in their hearts was clear and express enough for any reasonable creatures, and would have directed them, had they not suffered their passions more forcibly to direct them otherwise: that if we are to judge from this effect, namely, the corruption of the world, the same prejudice will recur even against the christian religion,—since mankind have at least been as wicked in latter days, as in the more remote and simple ages of the world; and that, if we may trust to facts, there are no vices which the apostle fixes upon the heathen world, before the preaching of the gospel, which may not be paralleled by as black a catalogue of vices in the christian world since.

This necessarily brings us to an inquiry, Whether christianity has done the world any service ?—and, How, far the morals of it have been made better since this system has been embraced ?

In litigating this, one might oppose facts to facts to the end of the world, without coming one jot nearer to the point. Let us see how far their mistakes concerning the Deity will throw light upon the subject.

That there is one Supreme Being, who made this world, and who ought to be worshipped by his creatures, is the foundation of all religion, and so obvious a truth in nature,—that reason, as the apostle acknowledges, was always able to discover it: and yet it seems strange, that the same faculty which made the discovery, should be so little able to keep true to its own judgment, and support it long against the prejudices of wrong heads, and the propensity of weak ones, towards idolatry and a multiplicity of gods !

For want of something to have gone hand in hand with reason, and fixed the persuasion forever upon their minds, that there was in truth but one God, the maker and supporter of heaven and earth, infinite in wisdom and knowledge, and all perfections, —how soon was this simple idea lost, and mankind led to dispose of those attributes inherent in the Godhead, and divide and subdivide them again amongst deities which their own dreams had given substance to ;—his eternal power and dominion parcelled out to gods of the land,—to gods of the sea, —to gods of the infernal regions : whilst the great God of gods, and Lord of lords, who ruleth over all the kingdoms of the world,—who is so great that

nought is able to control or withstand his power, was supposed to rest contented with his allotment, and to want power to act within such parts of his empire as they dismembered and assigned to others!

If the number of their gods and this partition of their power, would lessen the idea of their majesty, What must be the opinions of their origin,—when, instead of that glorious description which scripture gives of "The Ancient of Days who inhabiteth eternity,"—they gravely assigned particular times and places for the births and education of their gods! so that there was scarce a hamlet, or even a desert, in Greece or Italy, which was not rendered memorable by some favour or accident of this kind!

And what rendered such conceits the more gross and absurd,—they supposed not only that the gods they worshipped had a beginning, but that they were produced by fleshly parents; and accordingly they attributed to them corporeal shapes and difference of sex! and indeed in this they were a little consistent, for their deities seemed to partake so much of their frailties to which flesh and blood is subject, that their history and their pedigree were much of a piece, and might reasonably claim each other;—for they imputed to them not only the human defects of ignorance, want, fear, and the like, but the most unmanly sensualities, and what would be a reproach to human nature;—such as cruelty, adulteries, rapes, incest! and even in the accounts which we have from the sublimest of their poets,—what are they but anecdotes of their squabbles amongst themselves,—their intrigues, their jealousies, their ungovernable transports of choler, —nay, even their thefts,—their drunkenness, and bloodshed!

Here let us stop a moment and inquire, what was reason doing all this time, to be so miserably insulted and abused? Where held she her empire whilst her bulwarks were thus borne down, and her first principles of religion and truth lay buried under them? If she was able by herself to regain the power she had lost, and put a stop to this folly and confusion,—why did she not? If she was not able to resist this torrent alone,—the point is given up,—she wanted aid; and revelation has given it.—But though reason, you'll say, would not overthrow these popular mistakes,—yet it saw the folly of them, and was at all times able to disprove them.

No doubt it was; and it is certain too, that the more diligent inquiries after truth, did not in fact fall into these absurd notions, which, by the way, is an observation more to our purpose than theirs, who usually make it, and shews, that though their reasonings were good, that there always wanted something which they could not supply, to give them such weight as would lay an obligation upon mankind to embrace them, and make that to be a law, which otherwise was but an opinion without force.

Besides,—which is a more direct answer,—though 'tis true the ablest men gave no credit to the multiplicity of gods,—(for they had a religion for themselves, and another for the populace) yet they were guilty of what in effect was equally bad, in holding an opinion which necessarily supported these very mistakes,—namely, that as different nations had different gods, it was every man's duty (I suppose more for quietness than principle's sake) to worship the gods of his country; which, by the way, considering their numbers, was not so

easy a task ;—for what with celestial gods, and gods aërial, terrestrial, and infernal, with the goddesses, their wives and mistresses, upon the lowest computation, the heathen world acknowledged no less than thirty thousand deities, all which claimed the rights and ceremonies of religious worship !

But 'twill be said, allowing the bulk of mankind were under such delusions,—they were but speculative.—What was that to their practice ? However defective in their theology and more abstracted points, their morality was no way connected with it. —There is no need that the everlasting laws of justice and mercy should be fetched down from above, —since they can be proved from more obvious mediums ;—they were as necessary for the same good purposes of society then as now ; and we may presume they saw their interest and pursued it.

That the necessities of society, and the impossibilities of its subsisting otherwise, would point out the convenience, or, if you will,—the duty of social virtues, is unquestionable :—but I firmly deny that therefore religion and morality are independent of each other : they appear so far from it, that I cannot conceive how the one, in the true and meritorious sense of the duty, can act without the influence of the other. Surely, the most exalted motive which can only be depended upon for the uniform practice of virtue,—must come down from above,—from the love and imitation of the goodness of that Being in whose sight we wish to render ourselves acceptable : this will operate at all times and all places,—in the darkest closet as much as on the greatest and most publick theatres of the world.

But with different conceptions of the Deity, or

such impure ones as they entertained, is it to be doubted whether, in the many secret trials of our virtue, we should not determine our cases of conscience with much the same kind of casuistry as that of the libertine in Terence, who being engaged in a very unjustifiable pursuit, and happening to see a picture which represented a known story of Jupiter in a like transaction,—argued the matter thus within himself:—If the great Jupiter could not restrain his appetites, and deny himself an indulgence of this kind,—*ego Homuncio hoc non facerem?* Shall I a mortal,—an inconsiderable mortal too, clothed with infirmities of flesh and blood, pretend to a virtue which the Father of gods and men could not? What insolence!

The conclusion was natural enough; and as so great a master of nature puts it into the mouth of one of his principal characters, no doubt the language was then understood; it was copied from common life, and was not the first application which had been made of the story.

It will scarce admit of a question, Whether vice would not naturally grow bold upon the credit of such an example? or, whether such impressions did not influence the lives and morals of many in the heathen world? and had there been no other proof of it but the natural tendency of such notions to corrupt them, it had been sufficient reason to believe it was so.

No doubt,—there is sufficient room for amendment in the christian world; and we may be said to be a very corrupt and bad generation of men, considering what motives we have from the purity of our religion, and the force of its sanctions, to make

us better :—yet still I affirm, If these restraints were taken off, the world would be infinitely worse ; and though some sense of morality might be preserved, as it was in the heathen world, with the more considerate of us,—yet in general I am persuaded, that the bulk of mankind upon such a supposition, would soon come to " live without God in the world," and in a short time differ from Indians themselves in little else but their complexions.

If, after all, the christian religion has not left a sufficient provision against the wickedness of the world,—the short and true answer is this, That there can be none.

It is sufficient to leave us without excuse, that the excellency of this institution, in its doctrine, its precepts, and its examples, has a proper tendency to make us a virtuous and a happy people ;—every page is an address to our hearts, to win them to these purposes ;—but religion was not intended to work upon men by force and natural necessity, but by moral persuasion, which sets good and evil before them ;—so that if men have power to do the evil and choose the good,—and will abuse it,—this cannot be avoided.—Religion ever implies a freedom of choice : and all the beings in the world which have it, were created free to stand and free to fall ;—and therefore men who will not be persuaded by this way of address, must expect, and be contented to be reckoned with according to the talents they have received.

SERMON XXVII.

THE ABUSES OF CONCIENCE CONSIDERED.

HEBREWS XIII. 18.

—For we trust we have a good conscience.—

Trust!—Trust we have a good conscience!—Surely, you will say, if there is any thing in this life which a man may depend upon, and to the knowledge of which he is capable of arriving upon the most indisputable evidence, it must be this very thing,—Whether he has a good conscience, or no.

If a man thinks at all, he cannot well be a stranger to the true state of this account:—He must be privy to his own thoughts and desires;—he must remember his past pursuits, and know certainly the true springs and motives which, in general, have governed the actions of his life.

In other matters we may be deceived by false appearances; and as the wise man complains, "hardly "do we guess aright at the things that are upon the "earth; and with labour do we find the things that "are before us:"—but here the mind has all the evidence and facts within herself;—is conscious of the web she has wove;—knows its texture and fineness; and the exact share which every passion has had in working upon the several designs which virtue or vice has plann'd before her.

Now,—as conscience is nothing else but the knowledge which the mind has within itself of this;

and the judgment, either of approbation or censure, which it unavoidably makes upon the successive actions of our lives,—'tis plain, you will say, from the very terms of the proposition, whenever this inward testimony goes against a man, and he stands self-accused,—that he must necessarily be a *guilty man*. And, on the contrary, when the report is favourable on his side, and his heart condemns him not,—that it is not a matter of *trust*, as the apostle intimates, but a matter of certainty and fact, that the *conscience is good*, and that the *man* must be *good* also.

At first sight, this may seem to be a true state of the case; and I make no doubt but the knowledge of right and wrong is so truly impress'd upon the mind of man, that did no such thing ever happen, as that the conscience of a man, by long habits of sin, might (as the scripture assures us it may) insensibly become hard, and, like some tender parts of his body, by much stress and continual hard usage, lose, by degrees, that nice sense and perception with which God and nature endowed it;—did this never happen;—or was it certain that self-love could never hang the least bias upon the judgment;—or, that the little interests below could raise up and perplex the faculties of our upper regions, and encompass them about with clouds and thick darkness;—could no such thing as favour and affection enter this sacred court;—did wit disdain to take a bribe in it, or was ashamed to shew its face as an advocate for an unwarrantable enjoyment;—or, lastly, were we assured that interest stood always unconcerned whilst the cause was hearing,—and that passion never got into the judgment-seat, and pronounced sentence in the stead of reason, which is supposed always to

preside and determine upon the case;—was this truly so, as the objection must suppose,—no doubt, then, the religious and moral state of a man would be exactly what he himself esteemed it; and the guilt or innocence of every man's life could be known, in general, by no better measure than the degrees of his own approbation or censure.

I own, in one case, whenever a man's conscience does accuse him (as it seldom errs on that side) that he is guilty; and, unless in melancholy and hypochondriack cases, we may safely pronounce that there are always sufficient grounds for the accusation.

But the converse of the proposition will not hold true;—namely, That wherever there is guilt, the conscience must accuse; and, if it does not, that a man is therefore innocent.—This is not fact:—so that the common consolation which some good christian or other is hourly administering to himself,—That he thanks God his mind does not misgive him; and that, consequently, he has a good conscience, because he has a quiet one; as current as the inference is, and as infallible as the rule appears at first sight, yet, when you look nearer to it, and try the truth of this rule upon plain facts, you find it liable to so much error, from a false application of it;—the principle on which it goes so often perverted;—the whole force of it lost, and sometimes so vilely cast away, that it is painful to produce the common examples from human life which confirm this account.

A man shall be vitious and utterly debauched in his principles; exceptionable in his conduct to the world: shall live shameless,—in the open commission of a sin which no reason or pretence can justi-

fy ;—a sin, by which, contrary to all the workings of humanity within, he shall ruin forever the deluded partner of his guilt ;—rob her of her best dowry ;—and not only cover her own head with dishonour, but involve a whole virtuous family in shame and sorrow for her sake,—surely,—you'll think, conscience must lead such a man a troublesome life :—he can have no rest night nor day from its reproaches.

Alas ! conscience had something else to do all this time than break in upon him : as Elijah reproached the god Baal, this domestick god was either "talking, or pursuing, or was in a journey, or, peradventure, he slept, and could not be awoke." Perhaps he was gone out, in company with HONOUR, to fight a duel ;—to pay off some debt at play ;—or dirty annuity, the bargain of his lust.—Perhaps, conscience all this time was engaged at home, talking aloud against petty larceny, and executing vengeance upon some such puny crimes as his fortune and rank in life secured him against all temptation of committing :—so that he lives as merrily,—sleeps as soundly in his bed ;—and, at the last, meets death with as much unconcern,—perhaps, much more so,—than a much better man.

Another is sordid, unmerciful ;—a straithearted, selfish wretch, incapable either of private friendships or publick spirit.—Take notice how he passes by the widow and orphan in their distress ; and sees all the miseries incident to human life without a sigh or a prayer !—Shall not conscience rise up and sting him on such occasions ? No.—Thank God, there is no occasion. 'I pay every man his own ;—'I have no fornication to answer to my conscience,

' no faithless vows or promises to make up ;—I ' have debauched no man's wife or child.—Thank ' God, I am not as other men, adulterers, unjust ; ' or even as this libertine who stands before me.'

A third is crafty and designing in his nature.—View his whole life,—'tis nothing else but a cunning contexture of dark arts and inequitable subterfuges, basely to defeat the true intent of all laws, plain-dealing, and the safe enjoyment of our several properties.—You will see such a one working out a frame of little designs upon the ignorance and perplexities of the poor and needy man :—shall raise a fortune upon the inexperience of youth,—or the unsuspecting temper of his friend, who would have trusted him with his life. When old age comes on, and repentance calls him to look back upon this black account, and state it over again with his conscience ; —conscience looks into the statutes at large,—finds perhaps no express law broken by what he has done ; —perceives no penalty or forfeiture incurred ;—sees no scourge waving over his head,—or prison opening its gate upon him.—What is there to affright his conscience ?—Conscience has got safely entrenched behind the letter of the law, sits there invulnerable, fortified with cases and reports so strongly on all sides,—that 'tis not preaching can dispossess it of its hold.

Another shall want even this refuge ;—shall break through all this ceremony of slow chicane ; scorns the doubtful workings of secret plots and cautious trains to bring about his purpose.—See the barefaced villain how he cheats, lies, perjures, robs, murders !—Horrid ! But indeed much better was not to be expected in this case ;—the poor man was in

the dark !—His priest had got the keeping of his conscience, and all he had let him know of it was, That he must believe in the Pope,—go to mass,—cross himself,—tell his beads,—be a good catholick; and that this in all conscience was enough to carry him to heaven. What ?—if he perjures ?—Why,—he had a mental reservation in it. But if he is so wicked and abandoned a wretch as you represent him,—if he robs or murders, will not conscience, on every such act, receive a wound itself ?—Ay,—But the man has carried it to confession, the wound digests there, and will do well enough,—and in a short time be quite healed up by absolution.

O Popery ! what hast thou to answer for !—when, not content with the too many natural and fatal ways through which the heart is every day thus treacherous to itself above all things,—thou hast wilfully set open this wide gate of deceit before the face of this unwary traveller,—too apt, God knows, to go astray of himself,—and confidently speak peace to his soul, when there is no peace !

Of this, the common instances which I have drawn out of life are too notorious to require much evidence. If any man doubts the reality of them, or thinks it impossible for man to be such a bubble to himself,—I must refer him a moment to his reflections, and shall then venture to trust the appeal with his own heart. Let him consider in how different a degree of detestation numbers of wicked actions stand there, though equally bad and vitious in their own natures ;—he will soon find that such of them as strong inclination or custom have prompted him to commit, are generally dressed out and painted with all the false beauties which a soft and flattering

hand can give them ; and that the others, to which he feels no propensity, appear, at once, naked and deformed, surrounded with all the true circumstances of folly and dishonour.

When David surprised Saul sleeping in the cave, and cut off the skirt of his robe,—we read, his heart smote him for what he had done.—But, in the matter of Uriah, where a faithful and gallant servant, whom he ought to have loved and honoured, fell to make way for his lust (where conscience had so much greater reason to take the alarm)—his heart smote him not !—A whole year had almost passed from the first commission of that crime, to the time Nathan was sent to reprove him ; and we read not once of the least sorrow or compunction of heart which he testified during all that time, for what he had done.

Thus conscience, this once able monitor,—placed on high as a judge within us,—and intended by our Maker as a just and equitable one too,—by an unhappy train of causes and impediments,—takes often such imperfect cognizance of what passes,—does its office so negligently,—sometimes so corruptly, that it is not to be trusted alone : and therefore, we find, there is a necessity, an absolute necessity, of joining another principle with it, to aid, if not govern, its determinations.

So that, if you would form a just judgment of what is of infinite importance to you not to be misled in, namely, in what degree of real merit you stand, either as an honest man,—an useful citizen, —a faithful subject to your king,—or a good servant to your God,—call in religion and morality.—Look—What is written in the law of God ?—How

readest thou ?—Consult calm reason and the unchangeable obligations of justice and truth :—What say they ?

Let conscience determine the matter upon these reports,—and then, if " thy heart condemn thee " not,"—which is the case the apostle supposes,—the rule will be infallible :—" Thou wilt have con- " fidence towards God ;"—that is, have just grounds to believe the judgment thou hast passed upon thyself is the judgment of God ; and nothing else but an anticipation of that righteous sentence, which shall be pronounced hereafter upon thee by that Being, before whom thou art finally to give an account of thy actions.

" Blessed is the man," indeed then, as the author of the book of Ecclesiasticus expresses it, " who is " not pricked with the multitude of his sins.—Bless- " ed is the man whose heart hath not condemned, " and who is not fallen from his hope in the Lord. " Whether he be rich," continues he, " or whether " he be poor,—if he have a good heart," (a heart thus guided and informed)—" He shall at all times " rejoice in a cheerful countenance.—His mind " shall tell him more than seven watchmen that sit " above upon a tower on high."—In the darkest doubts it shall conduct him safer than a thousand casuists, and give the state he lives in a better security for his behaviour, than all the clauses and restrictions put together, which the wisdom of the legislature is forced to multiply ;—forced, I say, as things stand ; human laws being not a matter of original choice, but of pure necessity, brought in to fence against the mischievous effects of those consciences which are no law unto themselves ; wise-

ly intending by the many provisions made, That in all such corrupt or misguided cases, where principle and the checks of conscience will not make us upright,—to supply their force, and, by the terrors of jails and halters, oblige us to it.

To have the fear of God before our eyes; and, in our mutual dealings with each other, to govern our actions by the eternal measures of right and wrong: —the first of these will comprehend the duties of religion; the second those of morality: which are so inseparably connected together, that you cannot divide these two tables, even in imagination (though the attempt is often made in practice)—without breaking and mutually destroying them both.

I said the attempt is often made;—and so it is; —there being nothing more common than to see a man, who has no sense at all of religion,—and indeed has so much of honesty, as to pretend to none, who would yet take it as the bitterest affront, should you but hint at a suspicion of his moral character,— or imagine he was not conscientiously just, and scrupulous to the uttermost mite.

When there is some appearance that it is so,— though one is not willing even to suspect the appearance of so great a virtue as moral honesty,— yet, were we to look into the grounds of it in the present case, I am persuaded we should find little reason to envy such a man the honour of his motive.

Let him declaim as prompously as he can on the subject, it will be found at last to rest upon no better foundation than either his interest, his pride, his ease, or some such little and changeable passion, as

will give us but small dependence upon his actions in matters of great stress.

Give me leave to illustrate this by an example.

I know the banker I deal with, or the physician I usually call in, to be neither of them men of much religion: I hear them make a jest of it every day, and treat all its sanctions with so much scorn and contempt, as to put the matter past doubt. Well,—notwithstanding this, I put my fortune into the hands of the one,—and, what is dearer still to me, I trust my life to the honest skill of the other.—Now, let me examine what is my reason for this great confidence.—Why,—in the first place, I believe that there is no probability that either of them will employ the power I put into their hands to my disadvantage. I consider that honesty serves the purposes of this life;—I know their success in the world depends upon the fairness of their characters;—that they cannot hurt me without hurting themselves more.

But put it otherwise, namely, that interest lay for once on the other side:—that a case should happen wherein the one, without stain to his reputation, could secrete my fortune, and leave me naked in the world;—or, that the other could send me out of it, and enjoy an estate by my death, without dishonour to himself or his art.—In this case, what hold have I of either of them?—Religion, the strongest of all motives, is out of the question.—Interest, the next most powerful motive in this world, is strongly against me.—I have nothing left to cast into the scale to balance this temptation.—I must lie at the mercy of honour,—or some such capricious princi-

ple,—Strait security! for two of my best and most valuable blessings,—my property and my life!

As therefore we can have no dependence upon morality without religion;—so, on the other hand, there is nothing better to be expected from religion without morality; nor can any man be supposed to discharge his duties to God, whatever fair appearances he may hang out that he does so, if he does not pay as conscientious a regard to the duties which he owes his fellow-creature.

This is a point capable in itself of strict demonstration.—Nevertheless, 'tis no rarity to see a man whose real moral merit stands very low, who yet entertains the highest notion of himself, in the light of a devout and religious man. He shall not only be covetous, revengeful, implacable,—but even wanting in points of common honesty;—yet, because he talks loud against the infidelity of the age,—is zealous for some points of religion,—goes twice a day to church, attends the sacraments, and amuses himself with a few instrumental duties of religion,—shall cheat his conscience into a judgment that for this he is a religious man, and has discharged faithfully his duty to God: and you will find that such a man, through force of this delusion, generally looks down with spiritual pride upon every other man who has less affectation of piety, though, perhaps, ten times more moral honesty than himself.

"This is likewise a sore evil under the sun;" and, I believe, there is no one mistaken principle which, for its time, has wrought more serious mischiefs. For a general proof of this, examine the history of the Romish church.—See what scenes of cruelty, murders, rapines, bloodshed, have all been

sanctified by a religion not strictly governed by morality!

In how many kingdoms of the world has the crusading sword of this misguided saint-errant spared neither age, nor merit, nor sex, nor condition!—And, as he fought under the banners of a religion which set him loose from justice and humanity—he shewed none,—mercilessly trampled upon both,—heard neither the cries of the unfortunate, nor pitied their distresses.

If the testimony of past centuries in this matter is not sufficient,—consider at this instant, how the votaries of that religion are every day thin kng to do service and honour to God, by actions which are a dishonour and scandal to themselves.

To be convinced of this, go with me for a moment into the prisons of the inquisition.—Behold religion, with mercy and justice chained down under her feet,—there sitting ghastly upon a black tribunal, propped up with racks and instruments of torment!—Hark!—What a piteous groan!—See the melancholy wretch who uttered it, just brought forth to undergo the anguish of a mock-trial, and endure the utmost pains that a studied system of religious cruelty has been able to invent! Behold this helpless victim delivered up to his tormentors: his body so wasted with sorrow and long confinement, you'll see every nerve and muscle as it suffers!—Observe the last movement of that horrid engine.—What convulsions it has thrown him into! Consider the nature of the posture in which he now lies stretched—What exquisite torture he endures by it!—'Tis all nature can bear.—Good God! see how it keeps his weary soul hanging upon his trembling lips, willing to take its leave,—but not suffered to

depart! Behold the unhappy wretch led back to his cell,—dragged out of it again to meet the flames,—and the insults in his last agonies, which this principle,—this principle, that there can be religion without morality, has prepared for him!

The surest way to try the merit of any disputed notion,—is to trace down the consequences such a notion has produced, and compare them with the spirit of Christianity.—'Tis the short and decisive rule, which our Saviour has left for these and such like cases,—and is worth a thousand arguments:—"By their fruits," says he, "ye shall know them."

Thus, religion and morality, like fast friends and natural allies, can never be set at variance, without the mutual ruin and dishonour of them both;—and whoever goes about this unfriendly office, is no well-wisher to either;—and, whatever he pretends, he deceives his own heart; and, I fear, his morality, as well as his religion, will be vain.

I will add no farther to the length of this discourse, than by two or three short and independent rules, deducible from what has been said.

1st, Whenever a man talks loudly against religion, always suspect that it is not his reason, but his passions which have got the better of his creed.—A bad life and a good belief are disagreeable and troublesome neighbours; and where they separate, depend upon it, 'tis for no other cause but quietness sake.

2dly, When a man thus represented, tells you in any particular instance, that such a thing goes against his conscience,—always believe he means exactly the same thing as when he tells you such a thing goes against his stomach,—a present want of appetite being generally the true cause of both.

In a word,—trust that man in nothing,—who has not a conscience in every thing.

And in your own case remember this plain distinction, a mistake in which has ruined thousands,—that your conscience is not a law ;—no,—God and reason made the law, and has placed conscience within you to determine,—not like an Asiatick cadi, according to the ebbs and flows of his own passions; but like a British judge in this land of liberty, who makes no new law,—but faithfully declares that glorious law which he finds already written.

SERMON XXVIII.

TEMPORAL ADVANTAGES OF RELIGION.

PROV. III. 17.

Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.

THERE are two opinions which the inconsiderate are apt to take upon trust.—The first is,—A vitious life is a life of liberty, pleasure, and happy advantages.—The second is,—and which is the converse of the first,—That a religious life is a servile and most uncomfortable state.

The first breach which the devil made upon human innocence, was, by the help of the first of these suggestions, when he told Eve, that by eating of the tree of knowledge, she should be as God; that is, she should reap some high and strange felicity from doing what was forbidden her.—But I need not repeat the success:—Eve learnt the difference between good and evil by her transgression, which she knew not before;—but then she fatally learnt at the same time, that the difference was only this:—That GOOD is that which can only give the mind pleasure and comfort;—and that EVIL is that which must necessarily be attended, sooner or later, with shame and sorrow.

As the deceiver of mankind thus began his triumph over our race,—so has he carried it on ever since by the very same argument of delusion;—that is, by possessing men's minds early with great

expectations of the present incomes of sin,—making them dream of wondrous gratifications they are to feel in following their appetites in a forbidden way,—making them fancy, that their own grapes yield not so delicious a taste as their neighbour's, and that they shall quench their thirst with more pleasure at his fountain, than at their own. This is the opinion which at first too generally prevails,—till experience and proper seasons of reflection make us, at one time or other, all confess,—that our counsellor has been (as from the beginning) an impostor;—and that, instead of fulfilling these hopes of gain and sweetness in what is forbidden,—that, on the contrary, every unlawful enjoyment leads only to bitterness and loss.

The second opinion, or, That a religious life is a servile and uncomfortable state, has proved a no less fatal and capital false principle in the conduct of inexperience through life,—the foundation of which mistake arising chiefly from this previous wrong judgment,—that true happiness and freedom lie in a man's always following his own humour;—that to live by moderate and prescribed rules, is to live without joy;—that not to prosecute our passions is to be cowards,—and to forego every thing for the tedious distance of a future life.

Was it true, that a virtuous man could have no pleasure but what should arise from that remote prospect.—I own we are, by nature, so goaded on by the desire of present happiness, that was that the case, thousands would faint under the discouragement of so remote an expectation.—But, in the mean time, the scriptures give us a very different prospect of this matter.—Here we are told, that the

service of God is true liberty,—that the yoke of christianity is easy, in comparison of that yoke which must be brought upon us by any other system of living; and the text tells of wisdom,—by which is meant religion; that it has pleasantness in its way, as well as glory in its end!—that it will bring us peace and joy, such as the world cannot give!—So that, upon examining the truth of this assertion, we shall be set right in this error, by seeing that a religious man's happiness does not stand at so tedious a distance,—but is so present, and indeed so inseparable from him, as to be felt and tasted every hour;—and of this even the vitious can hardly be insensible, from what he may perceive to spring up in his mind from any casual act of virtue: and though it is a pleasure that properly belongs to the good,—yet let any one try the experiment, and he will see what is meant by that moral delight arising from the conscience of well-doing.—Let him but refresh the bowels of the needy,—let him comfort the broken-hearted,—or check an appetite,—or overcome a temptation,—or receive an affront with temper and meekness,—and he shall find the tacit praise of what he has done, darting through his mind, accompanied with a sincere pleasure;—conscience playing the monitor even to the loose and most inconsiderate, in their most casual acts of well-doing, and is, like a voice whispering behind, and saying,—This is the way of pleasantness,—this is the path of peace,—walk in it.

But to do farther justice to the text, we must look beyond this inward recompense, which is always inseparable from virtue,—and take a view of the outward advantages which are as inseparable from it,

and which the apostle particularly refers to, when 'tis said, godliness has the promise of this life, as well as that which is to come;—and in this argument it is that religion appears in all its glory and strength,—unanswerable in all its obligations;—that besides the principal work which it does for us in securing our future well-being in the other world, it is likewise the most effectual means to promote our present;—and that not only *morally*, upon account of that reward which virtuous actions do entitle a man unto from a just and wise providence,—but by a natural tendency in themselves, which the duties of religion have *to procure* us riches, health, reputation, credit, and all those things wherein our temporal happiness is thought to consist; and this not only in promoting the well-being of particular persons, but of publick communities and of mankind in general,—agreeable to what the wise man has left us on record, That righteousness exalteth a nation:—insomuch, that could we, in considering this argument, suppose ourselves to be in a capacity of expostulating with God, concerning the terms upon which we would submit to his government,—and to choose the laws ourselves which we would be bound to observe, it would be impossible for the wit of man to frame any other proposals which, upon all accounts, would be more advantageous to our own interests than those very conditions to which we are by the rules of religion and virtue:—and in this does the reasonableness of christianity, and the beauty and wisdom of providence, appear most eminently towards mankind, in governing us by such laws as do most apparently tend to make us happy;—and, in a word, in making that (in his mercy) to be our

duty, which, in his wisdom, he knows to be our interest;—that is to say, what is most conducive to the ease and comfort of our mind,—the health and strength of our body,—the honour and prosperity of our state and condition,—the friendship and goodwill of our fellow-creatures;—to the attainment of all which, no more effectual means can possibly be made use of, than that plain direction,—to lead an uncorrupted life, and to do the thing which is right; to use no deceit in our tongue, nor do evil to our neighbour.

For the better imprinting of which truth in your memories, give me leave to offer a few things to your consideration.

The first is,—that justice and honesty contribute very much towards all the faculties of the mind: I mean, that it clears up the understanding from that mist which dark and crooked designs are apt to raise in it,—and that it keeps up a regularity in the affections, by suffering no lust or *by-ends* to disorder them.—That it likewise preserves the mind from all damps of grief and melancholy, which are the sure consequences of unjust actions; and that by such an improvement of the faculties, it makes a man so much the abler to discern, and so much the more cheerful, active, and diligent to mind his business. —Light is sown for the righteous, says the prophet, and gladness for the upright in heart.

Secondly, let it be observed,—That in the continuance and course of a virtuous man's affairs, there is little probability of his falling into considerable disappointments or calamities;—not only because guarded by the providence of God, but that honesty is in its own nature the freest from danger.

First, because such a one lays no projects which it is the interest of another to blast, and therefore needs no indirect methods or deceitful practices to secure his interest by undermining others.—The paths of virtue are plain and straight; so that the blind, persons of the meanest capacity, shall not err.—Dishonesty requires skill to conduct it, and as great art to conceal,—what 'tis every one's interest to detect:—and, I think, I need not remind you how oft it happens, in attempts of this kind,—where worldly men, in haste to be rich, have overrun the only means to it,—and for want of laying their contrivances with proper cunning, or managing them with proper secrecy and advantage, have lost, forever, what they might have certainly secured by honesty and plain-dealing;—the general causes of the disappointments in their business, or of unhappiness in their lives, lying but too manifestly in their own disorderly passions; which, by attempting to carry them a shorter way to riches and honour, disappoint them of both forever, and make plain their ruin is from themselves, and that they eat the fruits which their own hands have watered and ripened.

Consider, in the third place, that as the religious and moral man (one of which he cannot be without the other) not only takes the surest course for success in his affairs, but is disposed to procure a help, which never enters into the thoughts of a wicked one; for being conscious of upright intentions, he can look towards heaven, and, with some assurance, recommend his affairs to God's blessing and direction:—whereas, the fraudulent and dishonest man dares not call for God's blessing upon his designs;

—or, if he does, he knows it is in vain to expect it. —Now, a man who believes that he has God on his side, acts with another sort of life and courage, than he who knows he stands alone;—like Esau, with his hand against every man, and every man's hand against his.

The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open to their cry;—but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.

Consider, in the fourth place, that in all good governments, who understand their own interests, the upright and honest man stands much fairer for preferment, and much more likely to be employed in all things where fidelity is wanted;—for all men, however the case may stand with themselves, love at least to find honesty in those they trust; nor is there any usage we more hardly digest, than that of being outwitted and deceived.—This is so true an observation, that the greatest knaves have no other way to get into business but by counterfeiting honesty, and pretending to be what they are not; and when the imposture is discovered, as it is a thousand to one but it will, I have just said what must be the certain consequence:—for when a such a one falls,—as he has none to help him, so he seldom rises again.

This brings us to a fifth particular, in vindication of the text,—that a virtuous man has this strong advantage on his side (the reverse of the last) that the more and longer he is known, so much the better he is loved,—so much the more trusted;—so that his reputation and his fortune have a gradual increase:—and if calamities or cross accidents should bear him down—(as no one stands out of their reach

in this world)—if he should fall, who would not pity his distress!—who would not stretch forth his hand to raise him from the ground!—wherever there was virtue, he might expect to meet a friend and a brother!—and this is not merely speculation but fact, confirmed by numberless examples in life, of men falling into misfortunes, whose character and probity have raised them helps, and borne them up when every other help has forsook them.

Lastly to sum up the account of the temporal advantages which probity has on its side,—let us not forget that greatest of all happiness, which the text refers to;—in the expression of all its paths being peace, peace and content of mind, arising from the consciousness of virtue; which is the true and only foundation of all earthly satisfaction: and where that is wanting, whatever other enjoyments you bestow upon a wicked man, they will as soon add a cubit to his stature as to his happiness.—In the midst of the highest entertainment,—this, like the handwriting upon the wall, will be enough to spoil and disrelish the feast;—but much more so, when the tumult and hurry of delight is over,—when all is still and silent,—when the sinner has nothing to do but attend its lashes and remorses;—and this, in spite of all the common arts of diversion, will be often the case of every wicked man;—for we cannot live always upon the stretch;—our faculties will not bear constant pleasure any more than constant pain:—there will be some vacancies;—and when there are, they will be sure to be filled with uncomfortable thoughts and black reflections:—so that, setting aside the great after-reckoning, the pleasures of the wicked are overbought, even in this world.

I conclude with one observation upon the whole of this argument, which is this :—

Notwithstanding the great force with which it has been often urged by good writers,—there are many cases which it may not reach,—wherein vitious men may seem to enjoy their portion of this life, and live as happy, and fall into as few troubles as other men ;—and, therefore, it is prudent not to lay more stress upon this argument than it will bear :—but always remember to call in to our aid that great and more unanswerable argument, which will answer the most doubtful cases that can be stated ;—and that is, the certainty of a future life, which christianity has brought to light. However men may differ in their opinions of the usefulness of virtue for our present purposes, no one was ever so absurd as to deny it served our best and our last interest,—when the little interests of this life were at an end.—Upon which consideration we should always lay the great weight which it is fittest to bear, as the strongest appeal, and most unchangeable motive that can govern our actions at all times. —However, as every good argument on the side of religion should, in proper times, be made use of,—it is fit sometimes to examine this,—by proving virtue is not even destitute of a present reward,—but carries in her hand a sufficient recompense for all the self-denials she may occasion.—She is pleasant in the way, as well as in the end ;—her ways being ways of pleasantness, and all her paths peace.—But it is her greatest and most distinguished glory,—that she befriends us hereafter, and brings us peace at the last ; and this is a portion she can never be disinherited of ;—which may God of his mercy grant us all for the sake of Jesus Christ !

SERMON XXIX.

OUR CONVERSATION IN HEAVEN.

PHIL. III. 20.

For our conversation is in heaven.

THESE words are the conclusion of the account which St. Paul renders of himself, to justify that particular part of his conduct and proceeding,—his leaving so strangely, and deserting his Jewish rites and ceremonies to which he was known to have been formerly so much attached, and in defence of which he had been so warmly and so remarkably engaged. This, as it had been matter of provocation against him amongst his own countrymen the Jews, so was it no less an occasion of surprise to the Gentiles;—that a person of his great character, interest, and reputation,—one who was descended from a tribe of Israel, deeply skilled in the professions, and zealous in the "observances of the strait-"est sect of that religion;" who had their tenets instilled into him from his tender years, under the institution of the ablest masters,—a pharisee himself,—the son of a pharisee,—and brought up at the feet of Gamaliel; one that was so deeply interested, and an accessary in the persecution of another religion just then newly come up;—a religion to which his whole sect, as well as himself, had been always the bitterest and most inveterate enemies; and were constantly upbraided as such, by the first

founder of it :—that a person so beset and hemm'd in with interests and prejudices on all sides, should, after all, turn proselyte to the very religion he had hated ;—a religion too, under the most universal contempt of any then in the world ; the chiefs and leaders of it men of the lowest birth and education, without any advantages of parts or learning, or other endowments to recommend them :—that he should quit and abandon all his former privileges to become merely a fellow-labourer with these ;—that he should give up the reputation he had acquired amongst his brethren by the study and labours of a whole life ;—that he should give up his friends, his relations, and family, from whom he estranged and banished himself for life :—this was an event so very extraordinary, so odd and unaccountable,—that it might well confound the minds of men to answer for it.—It was not to be accounted for upon the common rules and measures of proceeding in human life.

The apostle, therefore, since no one else could so well do it for him, comes, in this chapter, to give an explanation why he had thus forsaken so many worldly advantages,—which was owing to a greater and more unconquerable affection to a better and more valuable interest ;—that, in the poor persecuted faith,—which he had once reproached and destroyed,—he had now found such a fulness of divine grace,—such unfathomable depths of God's infinite mercy and love towards mankind, that he could think nothing too much to part with, in order to his embracing christianity :—nay, he accounted all things but loss,—that is, less than nothing, for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

The apostle, after this apology for himself, proceeds, in the second verse before the text, to give a very different representation of the worldly views and sensual principles of other pretending teachers, —who had set themselves up as an example for men to walk by, against whom he renews this caution :—For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies to the cross of Christ,—whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things,—φρονουντες,—relish them, making them the only object of their wishes, taking aim at nothing better, and nothing higher ;—but *our* conversation, says he in the text, is in heaven. We christians, who have embraced a persecuted faith, are governed by other considerations,—have greater and nobler views : here we consider ourselves only as pilgrims and strangers.—Our home is in another country, where we are continually tending ; there our hearts and affections are placed ; and when the few days of our pilgrimage shall be over, there shall we return, where a quiet habitation and perpetual rest is designed and prepared for us forever !—Our conversation is in heaven ; from whence, says he, we also look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able to subdue all things unto him.—It is observable, that St. Peter represents the state of christians under the same image of strangers on earth, whose city and proper home is heaven. He makes use of that relation of citizens of heaven, as a strong argument for a pure and holy life,—be-

seeching them *as* pilgrims and strangers *here ;* as men whose interests and connections are of so short a date, and so trifling a nature,—to abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul (that is, unfit it for its heavenly country) and give it a disrelish to the enjoyment of that pure and spiritualized happiness of which that religion must consist, wherein there shall in no-wise enter any thing that defileth ; neither whatsoever worketh abomination. —The apostle tells us, That without holiness, no man shall see God ;—by which, no doubt he means, that a virtuous life is the only medium of happiness and terms of salvation, which can only give us admission into heaven.—But some of our divines carry the assertion further, That without holiness,—without some previous similitude wrought in the faculties of the mind, corresponding with the nature of the purest of beings, who is to be the object of our fruition hereafter ;—that it is not morally only, but physically impossible for it to be happy ; —and that an impure and polluted soul is not only unworthy of so pure a presence as the Spirit of God, but even incapable of enjoying it, could it be admitted.

And here, not to feign a long hypothesis, as some have done, of a sinner's being admitted into heaven, with a particular description of his condition and behaviour there,—we need only consider, that the supreme good, like any other good, is of a relative nature, and, consequently, the enjoyment of it must require some qualification in the faculty, as well as the enjoyment of any other good does ;—there must be something antecedent in the disposition and temper, which will render that good a good to that

individual;—otherwise, though (it is true) it may be possessed,—yet it never can be enjoyed.

Preach to a voluptuous epicure, who knows of no other happiness in this world but what arises from good eating and drinking;—such a one, in the apostle's language, whose god is his belly;—preach to him of the abstractions of the soul, tell of its flights and brisker motion in the pure regions of immensity;—represent to him that saints and angels eat not,—but that the spirit of a man lives forever upon wisdom and holiness, and heavenly contemplations:—why, the only effect would be, that the fat glutton would stare a while upon the preacher, and in a few minutes fall fast asleep.—No; if you would catch his attention, and make him take in your discourse greedily,—you must preach to him out of the Alcoran,—talk of the raptures of sensual enjoyments, and of the pleasures of the perpetual feasting which Mahomet has described;—there you touch upon a note which awakens and sinks into the inmost recesses of his soul;—without which, discourse as wisely and abstractedly as you will of heaven, your representations of it, however glorious and exalted, will pass like the songs of melody over an ear incapable of discerning the distinction of sounds.

We see, even in the common intercourses of society,—how tedious it is to be in the company of a person whose humour is disagreeable to our own, though, perhaps, in all other respects of the greatest worth and excellency!—How then can we imagine that an ill-disposed soul, whose conversation never reached to heaven, but whose appetites and desires, to the last hour, have grovell'd upon this unclean

spot of earth,—how can we imagine it should hereafter take pleasure in God,—or be able to taste joy or satisfaction from his presence, who is so infinitely pure that he even putteth no trust in his saints !—nor are the heavens themselves (as Job says) clean in his sight !—The consideration of this has led some writers so far as to say, with some degree of irreverence in the expression,—That it was not in the power of God to make a wicked man happy, if the soul was separated from the body, with all its vitious habits and inclinations unreformed ;—which thought a very able divine in our church has pursued so far as to declare his belief,—That could the happiest mansion in heaven be supposed to be allotted to a gross and polluted spirit, it would be so far from being happy in it, that it would do penance there to all eternity :—by which he meant, it would carry such appetites along with it, for which there could be found no suitable objects :—a sufficient cause for constant torment ;—for those that it found there, would be so disproportioned, that they would rather vex and upbraid it, than satisfy its wants.—This, it is true, is mere speculation,—and what concerns us not to know ;—it being enough for our purpose, that such an experiment is never likely to be tried ;—that we stand upon different terms with God ;—that a virtuous life is the foundation of all our happiness ;—that as God has no pleasure in wickedness, neither shall any evil dwell with him ; and that, if we expect our happiness to be in heaven, we must have our conversation in heaven whilst upon earth,—make it the frequent subject of our thoughts and meditations,—let every step we take tend that way,—every action of our lives be con-

ducted by that great mark of the prize of our high calling, forgetting those things which are behind; forgetting this world,—disengaging our thoughts and affections from it, and thereby transforming them to the likeness of what we hope to be hereafter.—How can we expect the inheritance of the saints in light, upon other terms than what they themselves obtained it!

Can that body expect to rise and shine in glory that is a slave to lust, or dies in the fiery pursuit of an impure desire? Can that heart ever become the lightsome seat of peace and joy, that burns hot as an oven with anger, rage, envy, lust, and strife? full of wicked imaginations, set only to devise and entertain evil?

Can that flesh appear in the last day and inherit the kingdom of heaven in the glorified strength of perpetual youth, that is now clearly consumed in intemperance, sinks in the surfeit of continual drunkenness and gluttony, and then tumbles into the grave, and almost pollutes the ground that is under it?—Can we reasonably suppose that head shall ever wear or become the crown of righteousness and peace, in which dwells nothing but craft and avarice, deceit, and fraud, and treachery? which is always plodding upon worldly designs,—racked with ambition,—rent asunder with discord,—ever delighting in mischief to others, and unjust advantages to itself?—Shall that tongue, which is the glory of a man when rightly directed,—be ever set to God's heavenly praises, and warble forth the harmonies of the blessed, that is now full of cursing and bitterness, backbiting and slander, under which is ungodliness and vanity, and the poison of asps?

Can it enter into our hearts even to hope, that those hands can ever receive the reward of righteousness, that are full of blood, laden with the wages of iniquity, of theft, rapine, violence, extortion, or other unlawful gain? or that those feet shall ever be beautiful upon the mountains of light and joy, that were never shod for the preparation of the gospel,—that have run quite out of the way of God's word, and made hast only to do evil?—No, surely.—In this sense,—he that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still.

So inconsistent is the whole body of sin with the glories of the celestial body that shall be revealed hereafter,—that, in proportion as we fix the representation of these glories upon our minds, and in the more numerous particulars we do it,—the stronger the necessity as well as persuasion to deny ourselves all ungodliness and worldly lusts, to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, as the only way to entitle us to that blessedness spoken of in the Revelations,—of those who do his commandments, and have a right to the tree of life, and shall enter into the gates of the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels;—to the general assembly and church of the first-born that are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect,—who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb!

May God give us grace to live under the perpetual influence of this expectation!—that by the habitual impression of these glories upon our imaginations, and the frequent sending forth our thoughts and employing them on the other world,—we may disen-

tangle them from this ;—and by so having our conversation in heaven whilst we are here, we may be thought fit inhabitants for it hereafter ;—that when God, at the last day, shall come with thousands and ten thousands of his saints to judge the world, we may enter with them into happiness ; and with angels and archangels, and all the company of heaven, we may praise and magnify his glorious name, and enjoy his presence forever ! Amen.

SERMON XXX.

DESCRIPTION OF THE WORLD.

II PETER III. 11.

Seeing, then, that all these things shall be dissolved,—what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness? looking and hastening unto the coming of God.

The subject upon which St. Peter is discoursing in this chapter, is the certainty of Christ's coming to judge the world;—and the words of the text are the moral application he draws from the representation he gives of it;—in which, in answer to the cavils of the scoffers in the latter days, concerning the delay of his coming, he tells them, that God is not slack concerning his promises, as some men count slackness, but is long-suffering to us ward;—"that "the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the "night, in which the heavens shall pass away with "a great noise, and the elements shall melt with "fervent heat; the earth also, and the works that "are therein, shall be burnt up."—Seeing then, says he, all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?—The inference is unavoidable,—at least in theory, however it fails in practice:—how widely these two differ, I intend to make the subject of this discourse; and though it is a melancholy comparison, to consider 'what manner of persons we really *are*,' with 'what manner of persons we

'*ought* to be,' yet, as the knowledge of the one is at least one step towards improvement in the other,—the parallel will not be thought to want its use.

Give me leave, therefore, in the first place, to recall to your observations, what kind of world it is we live in, and what manner of persons we really are.

Secondly, and in opposition to this, I shall make use of the apostle's argument, and, from a brief representation of the christian religion and the obligations it lays upon us, shew what manner of persons we *ought* to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hastening unto the coming of the day of God.

Whoever takes a view of the world, will, I fear, be able to discern but very faint marks of this character, either upon the looks or actions of its inhabitants.—Of all the ends and pursuits we are looking for and hastening unto,—this would be the least suspected;—for, without running into that old declamatory cant upon the wickedness of the age,—we may say within the bounds of truth,—that there is as little influence from this principle, which the apostle lays stress on, and as little sense of religion, —as small a share of virtue (at least as little of the appearance of it) as can be supposed to exist at all in a country where it is countenanced by the state.—The degeneracy of the times has been the common complaint of many ages:—how much we exceed our forefathers in this, is known alone to that God who trieth the hearts.—But this we may be allowed to urge in their favour, they studied at least to preserve the appearance of virtue;—publick vice was branded with publick infamy, and obliged to hide its head in privacy and retirement. The service of

God was regularly attended, and religion not exposed to the reproaches of the scorner.

How the case stands with us at present in each of these particulars, it is grievous to report, and, perhaps, unacceptable to religion herself; yet, as this is a season wherein it is fit we should be told of our faults, let us, for a moment, impartially consider the articles of this charge.

And, first, concerning the great article of religion, and the influence it has at present upon the lives and behaviour of the present times; concerning which I have said, that, if we were to trust appearances, there is as little as can well be supposed to exist at all in a christian country. Here I shall spare exclamations, and, avoiding all common-place railing upon the subject, confine myself to facts, such as every one who looks into the world, and makes any observations at all, will vouch for me.

Now, whatever are the degrees of real religion amongst us,—whatever they are, the appearances are strong against the charitable side of the question.

If religion is anywhere to be found, one would think it would be amongst those of the higher rank in life, whose education, and opportunities of knowing its great importance, should have brought them over to its interest, and rendered them as firm in the defence of it as eminent in its example.—But, if you examine the fact, you will almost find it a test of politer education, and a mark of more shining parts, to know nothing, and, indeed, care nothing at all about it:—or, if the subject happens to engage the attention of a few of the more sprightly wits,—that it serves no other purpose but that of being made merry at, and of being reserved as a standing jest,

to enliven discourse, when conversation sickens upon their hands.——

This is too sore an evil not to be observed amongst persons of all ages, in what is called higher life; and so early does the contempt of this great concern begin to shew itself,—that it is no uncommon thing to hear persons disputing against religion, and raising cavils against the Bible, at an age when some of them would be hard set to read a chapter in it!—and, I may add, of those whose stock in knowledge is somewhat larger, that, for the most part, it has scarce any other foundation to rest on but the sinking credit of traditional and second-hand objections against revelation; which, had they leisure to read, they would find answered and confuted a thousand times over.—But this by the way.——

If we take a view of the publick worship of Almighty God, and observe in what manner it is reverenced by persons in this rank of life, whose duty it is to set an example to the poor and ignorant, we shall find concurring evidence upon this melancholy argument,—of a general want of all outward demonstration of a sense of our duty towards God, as if religion was a business fit only to employ tradesmen and mechanicks,—and the salvation of our souls a concern utterly below the consideration of a person of figure and consequence.

I shall say nothing at present of the lower ranks of mankind,—though they have not yet got into the fashion of laughing at religion, and treating it with scorn and contempt, and, I believe, are too serious a set of creatures ever to come into it; yet we are not to imagine but that the contempt it is held in by those whose examples they are apt to imitate, will,

in time, utterly shake their principles, and render them, if not as profane, at least as corrupt, as their betters.—When this event happens,— and we begin to *feel* the effects of it in our dealings with them, those who have done the mischief will find the necessity at last of turning religious in their own defence; and, for want of a better principle, to set an example of piety and good morals for their own interest and convenience.

Thus much for the languishing state of religion in the present age :—in virtue and good morals, perhaps, the account may stand higher.

Let us inquire.

And here, I acknowledge, that an inexperienced man, who heard how loudly we all talked in behalf of virtue and moral honesty, and how unanimous we were all in our cry against vitious characters of all denominations, would be apt hastily to conclude, that the whole world was in an uproar about it,—and that there was so general a horror and detestation of vice amongst us, that mankind were all associating together to hunt it out of the world, and give it no quarter. —This, I own, would be a natural conclusion for any one who only trusted his ears upon this subject.— But as matter of fact is allowed better evidence than hearsay,—let us see, in the present, how the one case is contradicted by the other.

However vehement we approve ourselves in discourse against vice,—I believe no one is ignorant that the reception it actually meets with is very different;—the conduct and behaviour of the world is so opposite to their language, and all we hear so contradicted by what we see, as to leave little room to question which sense we are to trust.

Look, I beseech you, amongst those whose higher stations are made a shelter for the liberties they take, you will see, that no man's character is so infamous, nor any woman's so abandoned, as not to be visited and admitted freely into all companies; and, if the party can pay for it, even publickly to be courted, caressed, and flattered.—If this will not overthrow the credit of our virtue,—take a short view of the general decay of it from the fashionable excesses of the age,—in favour of which there seems to be formed so strong a party, that a man of sobriety, temperance, and regularity, scarce knows how to accommodate himself to the society he lives in;—and is oft as much at a loss how and where to dispose of himself;—and, unless you suppose a mixture of constancy in his temper, it is great odds but such a one would be ridiculed, and laughed out of his scruples and his virtue at the same time,—to say nothing of occasional rioting, chambering, and wantonness.—Consider how many publick markets are established merely for the sale of virtue,—where the manner of going, too sadly indicates the intention;—and the disguise each is under, not only gives power safely to drive on the bargain, but too often tempts to carry it into execution too.

The sinning under disguise, I own, seems to carry some appearance of a secret homage to virtue and decorum, and might be acknowledged as such, was it not the only publick instance the world seems to give of it. In other cases, a just sense of shame seems a matter of so little concern, that, instead of any regularity of behaviour, you see thousands who are tired with the very form of it, and who, at length have even thrown the mask of it aside, as a useless

piece of incumbrance.—This, I believe, will need no evidence; it is too evidently seen in the open liberties taken every day, in defiance (not to say of religion, but) of decency and common good manners;—so that it is no uncommon thing to behold vices which, heretofore, were committed only in dark corners, now openly shew their face in broad day, and, oft-times, with such an air of triumph, as if the party thought he was doing himself honour,—or that he thought the deluding an unhappy creature, and the keeping her in a state of guilt, was as necessary a piece of grandeur as the keeping an equipage,—and did him as much credit as any other appendage of his fortune.

If we pass on from the vices to the indecorums of the age (which is a softer name for vices) you will scarce see any thing, in what is called higher life, but what bespeaks a general relaxation of all order and discipline, in which our opinions as well as manners seem to be set loose from all restraints, —and, in truth, from all serious reflections too;— and one may venture to say, that gaming and extravagance to the utter ruin of the greatest estates, —minds dissipated with diversions, and heads giddy with a perpetual rotation of them, are the most general characters to be met with; and though one would expect that, at least, the more solemn seasons of the year, set apart for the contemplation of Christ's sufferings, should give some check and interruption to them, yet what appearance is there ever amongst us that it is so?—what one alteration does it make in the course of things? Is not the doctrine of mortification insulted by the same luxury of entertainments at our tables?—is not the same order of diversions perpetually returning, and scarce

any thing else thought of?—does not the same levity in dress, as well as discourse, shew itself in persons of all ages? I say of all ages, for it is no small aggravation of the corruption of our morals, that age, which, by its authority, was once able to frown youth into sobriety and better manners, and keep them within bounds, seems but too often to lead the way, and, by their unseasonable example, give a countenance to follies and weakness, which youth is but too apt to run into without such a recommendation.—Surely age,—which is but one remove from death, should have nothing about it but what looks like a decent preparation for it.—In purer times it was the case;—but now,—grey hairs themselves scarce ever appear but in the high mode and flaunting garb of youth—with heads as full of pleasure, and clothes as ridiculously, and as much in the fashion, as the person who wears them is usually grown out of it;—upon which article give me leave to make a short reflection; which is this, that, whenever the eldest equal the youngest in the vanity of their dress, there is no reason to be given for it, but that they equal them, if not surpass them, in the vanity of their desires.

But this by the bye.

Though, in truth, the observation falls in with the main intention of this discourse,—which is not framed to flatter our follies, or touch them with a light hand, but plainly to point them out; that, by recalling to your mind what manner of persons we really are, I might better lead you to the apostle's inference, of what manner of persons ye ought to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hastening unto the coming of the day of God.

The apostle, in the concluding verse of this argument, exhorts, that they who look for such things be diligent, that they be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless ;—and one may conclude with him, that if the hopes or fears, either the reason or the passions of men are to be wrought upon at all, it must be from the force and influence of this awakening consideration in the text,—" That " all these things shall be dissolved ;"—that this vain and perishable scene must change ; that we, who now tread the stage, must shortly be summoned away ;—that we are creatures but of a day, hastening unto the place from whence we shall return no more ;—that, whilst we are here, our conduct and behaviour is minutely observed ;—that there is a Being about our paths and about our beds, whose omniscient eye spies out all our ways, and takes a faithful record of all the passages of our lives ;—that these volumes shall be produced and opened, and men shall be judged out of the things that are written in them ;—that, without respect of persons, we shall be made accountable for our thoughts, our words, and actions, to this greatest and best of Beings, before whose judgment-seat we must finally appear, and receive the things done in the body, whether they are good or whether they are bad.

That, to add to the terror of it,—this day of the Lord will come upon us like a thief in the night ;—of that hour no one knoweth ;—that we are not sure of its being suspended one day or one hour ; or, what is the same case,—that we are standing upon the edge of a precipice with nothing but the single thread of human life to hold us up ; and that, if we fall unprepared in this thoughtless state, we are lost, and must perish for evermore.

What manner of persons we ought to be, upon these principles of our religion, St. Peter has told us, in all holy conversation and godliness ;—and I shall only remind, how different a frame of mind the looking for and hastening unto the coming of God, under such a life, is, from that of spending our days in vanity, and our years in pleasure.

Give me leave, therefore, to conclude, in that merciful warning, which our Saviour, the Judge himself, hath given us at the close of the same exhortation.

Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and the cares of this life;—and so that day come upon you unawares ;—for as a snare shall it come upon all that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch, therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man : which may God of his mercy grant, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

SERMON XXXI.

ST. PETER'S CHARACTER.

ACTS III. 12.

And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?

These words, as the text tells us, were spoken by St. Peter, on the occasion of his miraculous cure of the lame man, who was laid at the gate of the temple, and (in the beginning of this chapter) had asked an alms of St. Peter and St. John, as they went up together at the hour of prayer;—on whom St. Peter fastening his eyes, as in the 4th verse, and declaring he had no such relief to give him as he expected, having neither silver nor gold,—but that such as he had, the benefit of that divine power which he had received from his Master, he would impart to him,—he commands him forthwith, in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, to rise up and walk.—And he took him by the hand, and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle-bones received strength; and he leaped up, stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, leaping and praising God.—

It seems he had been born lame, had passed a whole life of despair, without hopes of ever being restored;—so that the immediate sense of strength

and activity communicated to him at once, in so surprising and unsought-for a manner, cast him into the transport of mind natural to a man so benefitted beyond his expectation. So that the amazing instance of a supernatural power ;—the notoriety of the fact, wrought at the hour of prayer ;—the unexceptionableness of the object,—that it was no imposture,—for they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the beautiful gate of the temple ;—the unfeigned expressions of an enraptured heart almost beside itself, confirming the whole ;—the man that was healed (in the 10th verse) holding his benefactors, Peter and John,—entering into the temple with them, walking and leaping, and praising God; —the great concourse of people, drawn together by this event, (in the 11th verse)—for they all ran unto them, into the porch that was called Solomon's, greatly wondering. Sure never was such a fair opportunity for an ambitious mind to have established a character of superiour goodness and power.—To a man set upon this world, who sought his own praise and honour, what an invitation would it have been to have turned these circumstances to such a purpose !—to have fallen in with the passions of an astonished and grateful city, prepossessed, from what had happened, so strongly in his favour already, that little art or management was requisite to have improved their wonder and good opinion into the highest reverence of his sanctity, awe of his person, or whatever other belief should be necessary to feed his pride, or serve secret ends of glory and interest !—A mind not sufficiently mortified to the world, might have been tempted here to have taken the honour due to God,—and transferred it to

himself. He might,—not so a disciple of Christ; —for when Peter saw it,—when he saw the propensity in them to be misled on this occasion,—he answered and said unto the people, in the words of the text,—Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look you so earnestly on us, as though by our own power and holiness we had made this man to walk?—The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus.—

O holy, and blessed apostle!

How would thy meek and mortified spirit satisfy itself, in uttering so humble and so just a declaration?—What an honest triumph wouldst thou taste the sweets of,—in thus conquering thy passion of vain glory,—keeping down thy pride,—disclaiming the praises which should have fed it, by telling the wondering spectators, It was not thy own power,—it was not thy own holiness which had wrought this, —thou being of like passions and infirmities;—but that it was the power of the God of Abraham,—the holiness of thy dear Lord, whom they crucified, operating by faith through thee, who wast but an instrument in his hands.—If thus honestly declining honour, which the occasion so amply invited thee to take;—if this would give more satisfaction to a mind like thine, than the loudest praises of a mistaken people, what true rapture would be added to it from the reflection,—that in this instance of self-denial,—thou hadst not only done well,—but, what was a still more endearing thought, that thou hadst been able to copy the example of thy divine master; who, in no action of his life, sought ever his own praise, but, on the contrary, declined all possible

occasions of it ;—and in the only publick instance of honour which he suffered to be given him in his entrance into Jerusalem,—thou didst remember,—it was accepted with such a mixture of humility, that the prediction of the prophet was not more exactly fulfilled in the hosannahs of the multitude, than in the meekness wherewith he received them, lowly and sitting upon an ass !—How could a disciple fail of profiting by the example of so humble a master, whose whole course of life was a particular lecture to this virtue, and, in every instance of it, shewed plainly he came not to share the pride and glories of life, or gratify the carnal expectation of ambitious followers ; which, had he affected external pomp, he might have accomplished, by engrossing, as he could have done by a word, all the riches of the world ; and by the splendour of his court and dignity of his person, had been greater than Solomon in all his glory, and have attracted the applause and admiration of the world !—This every disciple knew was in his power ;—so that the meanness of his birth,—the toils and poverty of his life,—the low offices in which he was engaged, by preaching the gospel to the poor,—the numberless dangers and inconveniences attending the execution,—were all voluntary.—This humble choice both of friends and family out the meanest of the people,—amongst whom he appeared rather as a servant than a master, coming not as he often told them, to be ministered unto, but to minister ;—and as the prophet had foretold in that mournful description of him, having no form nor comeliness, nor any beauty that we should desire him,—

How could a disciple, you'll say, reflect without benefit on this amiable character, with all the other tender pathetick proofs of humility, which his memory would suggest had happened of a piece with it, in the course of his Master's life ;—but particularly at the conclusion and great catastrophe of it,—at his crucifixion,—the impressions of which could never be forgotten ?—When a life full of so many engaging instances of humility, was crowned with the most endearing one of humbling himself to the death of the cross,—the death of a slave and a malefactor,—suffering himself to be led like a lamb to the slaughter.—dragged to Calvary without opposition or complaint, and as a sheep before his shearer is dumb, opening not his mouth.—

O blessed Jesus ! well might a disciple of thine learn of thee to be meek and lowly of heart, as thou, exhortedst them all, for thou wast meek and lowly : —well might they profit, when such a lesson was seconded by such an example !—It is not to be doubted what force this must have had on the actions of those who were attendants and constant followers of our Saviour on earth ;—saw the meekness of his temper in the occurrences of his life, and the amazing proof of it at his death, who, though he was able to call down legions of angels to his rescue, or by a single act of omnipotence to have destroyed his enemies,—yet suppressed his almighty power,—neither resented,—nor revenged the indignity done him, but patiently suffered himself to be numbered with the transgressors !—

It could not well be otherwise, but that every eye-witness of this must have been wrought upon, in some degree, as the apostle, to let the same mind be

in him which also was in Christ Jesus. Nor will it be disputed how much of the honour of St. Peter's behaviour in the present transaction might be owing to the impressions he received on that memorable occasion of his Lord's death, sinking still deeper, from the affecting remembrance of the many instances his Master had given of this engaging virtue in the course of his life.

St. Peter certainly was of a warm and sensible nature, as we may collect from the sacred writings, —a temper fittest to receive all the advantages which such impressions could give;—and, therefore, as it is a day and place sacred to this great apostle, it may not be unacceptable, if I engage the remainder of your time in a short essay upon his character, principally as it relates to this particular disposition of heart, which is the subject of the discourse.

This great apostle was a man of distinction amongst the disciples; and was one of such virtues and qualifications, as seemed to have recommended him more than the advantage of his years or knowledge.

On his first admission to our Saviour's acquaintance, he gave a most evident testimony that he was a man of real and tender goodness, when being awakened by the miraculous draught of the fishes, as we read in the fifth of St. Luke, and knowing the author must necessarily be from God, he fell down instantly at his feet, broke out into this humble and pious reflection:—Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!—The censure, you will say, expresses him a sinful man;—but so to censure himself,—with such unaffected modesty, implies more

effectually than any thing else could,—that he was not, in the common sense of the word, a sinful,—but a good man; who, like the publican in the temple was no less justified for a self-accusation, extorted merely from the humility of a devout heart, jealous of its own imperfections. And though the words, *depart from me*, carry in them the face of fear, yet he who heard them, and knew the heart of the speaker, found they carried in them a greater measure of desire. For Peter was not willing to be discharged from his new guest; but fearing his unfitness to accompany him, longed to be made more worthy of his conversation. A meek and modest distrust of himself seemed to have had no small share at that time in his natural temper and complexion; and though it would be greatly improved, and no doubt much better principled by the advantages on which I enlarged above, in his commerce and observation with his Lord and Master,—yet it appears to have been an early and distinguishing part of his character.—And instance of this, though little in itself, and omitted by the other evangelists, is preserved by St. John, in his account of our Saviour's girding himself with a napkin, and washing the disciples feet; to which office not one of them is represented as making any opposition. But when he came to Simon Peter, the Evangelist tells,—Peter said to him, Dost THOU wash my feet? Jesus said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now, but shalt know hereafter.—Peter said unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet.—Humility for a moment triumphed over his submission; and he expostulates with him upon it, with all the earnest and tender opposition which was natural to a humble heart, confounded with shame, that his

Lord and Master should insist to do so mean and painful an act of servitude to him.

I would sooner form a judgment of a man's temper, from his behaviour on such little occurrences of life as these, than from the more weighed and important actions, where a man is more upon his guard ;—has more preparation to disguise the true disposition of his heart, and more temptation when disguised, to impose it on others.

This management was no part of Peter's character ; who, with all the real and unaffected humility which he shewed, was possessed of such a quick sensibility and promptness of nature, which utterly unfitted him for art and premeditation ; though this particular cast of temper had its disadvantages, at the same time, as it led him to an unreserved discovery of the opinions and prejudices of his heart, which he was wont to declare, and sometimes in so open and unguarded a manner, as exposed him to the sharpness of a rebuke where he could least bear it.

I take notice of this, because it will help us in some measure to reconcile a seeming contradiction in his character, which will naturally occur here, from considering that great and capital failing of his life, when, by a presumptuous declaration of his own fortitude, he fell into the disgrace of denying his Lord ; in both of which he acted so opposite to the character here given, that you will ask,—how could so humble a man as you describe, ever have been guilty of so self-sufficient and unguarded a vaunt, as that, though he should die with his Master,—yet would he not deny him ?—Or whence,—that so sin-

cere and honest a man was not better able to perform it?—

The case was this:—

Our Lord, before he was betrayed, had taken occasion to admonish his disciples of the peril of lapsing; telling them (31st verse) "All ye shall be offended because of me this night." To which Peter answering, with a zeal mixed with too much confidence,—that though all should be offended, yet will I never be offended. To check this trust in himself, our Saviour replies, that he in particular should deny him thrice. But Peter looking upon this monition no farther than as it applied a reproach to his faith, his love, and his courage; stung to the heart to have them called in question by his Lord, he hastily summons them all up to form his final resolution:—Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. The resolve was noble and dutiful to the last degree, and I make no doubt as honest a one; that is, both as just in the matter, and as sincere in the intention, as ever was made by any of mankind;—his character not suffering us to imagine he made it in a braving dissimulation:—no;—for he proved himself sufficiently in earnest by his subsequent behaviour in the garden, when he drew his sword against a whole band of men, and thereby made it appear, that he had less concern for his own life than he had for his Master's safety. How then came his resolution to miscarry?—The reason seems purely this:—Peter grounded the execution of it upon too much confidence in himself; doubted not but his will was in his power, whether God's grace assisted him or not; surely thinking, that what he had courage to resolve so honestly, he had

likewise ability to perform. This was his mistake; and though it was a very great one, yet it was in some degree a-kin to a virtue, as it sprung merely from a consciousness of his integrity and truth, and too adventurous a conclusion of what they would enable him to perform, on the sharpest encounters for his Master's sake: so that his failing in this point, was but a consequence of this hasty and ill-considered resolve; and his Lord, to rebuke and punish him for it, did no other than leave him to his own strength to perform it; which, in effect, was almost the same as leaving him to the necessity of not performing it at all. The great apostle had not considered, that he who precautioned him was the Searcher of Hearts, and needed not that any should testify of man, for he knew what was in man; he did not remember that his Lord had said before, "Without me ye can "do nothing;"—that the exertions of all our faculties were under the power of his will:—he had forgot the knowledge of this needful truth, on this one unhappy juncture, where he had so great a temptation to the contrary, though he was full of the persuasion in every other transaction of his life, but most visibly here in the text; where he breaks forth in the warm language of a heart still overflowing with remembrance of this very mistake he had once committed,—"Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at "this? as though by our own power and holiness "we had wrought this?—the God of Abraham, of "Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, through "faith in his name, hath made this man whole, "whom ye see and know."

This is the best answer I am able to make to this objection against the uniformity of the apostle's

character which I have given:—upon which let it be added,—that was no such apology capable of being made in its behalf,—that the truth and regularity of a character is not, in justice, to be looked upon as broken, from any one single act or omission which may seem a contradiction to it;—the best of men appear sometimes to be strange compounds of contradictory qualities; and, were the accidental oversights and folly of the wisest man,—the failings and imperfections of a religious man,—the hasty acts and passionate words of a meek man,—were they to rise up in judgment against them.—and an ill-natured judge be suffered to mark in this manner what has been done amiss,—what character so unexceptionable as to be able to stand before him?—so that, with the candid allowances which the infirmities of a man may claim when he falls through surprise more than a premeditation,—one may venture upon the whole to sum up Peter's character in a few words:—he was a man sensible in his nature,—of quick passions, tempered with the greatest humility, and most unaffected poverty of spirit that ever met in such a character.—So that in the only criminal instance of his life, which I have spoken to, you are at a loss which to admire most;—the tenderness and sensibility of his soul, in being wrought upon to repentance by a look from Jesus;—or the uncommon humility of it, which he testified thereupon, in the bitterness of his sorrow for what he had done.—He was once presumptuous in trusting to his own strength; his general and true character was that of the most engaging meekness,—distrustful of himself and his abilities to the last degree.

He denied his Master:—but in all instances of his life but that, was a man of the greatest truth and sincerity;—to which part of his character our Saviour has given an undeniable testimony, in conferring on him the symbolical name of Cephas, a rock, a name the most expressive of constancy and firmness.

He was a man of great love to his Master,—and of no less zeal for his religion, of which, from among many, I shall take one instance out of St. John, with which I shall conclude this account;—where, upon the desertion of several other disciples,—our Saviour puts the question to the twelve,—"Will "ye also go away?"—Then, says the text, "Peter "answered and said,—Lord! whither shall we go? "Thou hast the words of eternal life,—and we be-"lieve, and know that thou art Christ the Son of "of God."—Now, if we look into the gospel, we find what our Saviour pronounced on this very confession.

"Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona, for flesh "and blood hath not revealed it unto thee,—but my "Father which is in heaven."—That our Saviour had the words of eternal life,—Peter was able to deduce from principles of natural reason; because reason was able to judge from the internal marks of his doctrine, that it was worthy God, and accommodated properly to advance human nature and human happiness.—But for all this,—reason could not infallibly determine that the messenger of this doctrine was the Messias, the eternal Son of the living God:—to know this, required an illumination;—and this illumination, I say, seems to have been vouchsafed at that instant as a reward,—as would have been suffi-

cient evidence by itself of the disposition of his heart.—

I have now finished this short essay upon the character of St. Peter, not with a loud panegyrick upon the power of his keys, or a ranting encomium upon some monastick qualifications with which a popish pulpit would ring upon such an occasion, without doing much honour to the saint, or good to the audience;—but have drawn it with truth and sobriety, representing it as it was, as consisting of virtues the most worthy of imitation,—and grounded, not upon apocryphal accounts and legendary inventions, the wardrobe from whence popery dresses out her saints on these days, but upon matters of fact in the sacred scriptures, in which all Christians agree. And since I have mentioned popery, I cannot better conclude than by observing, how ill the spirit and character of that church resembles that particular part of St. Peter's which has been made the subject of this discourse.—Would one think that a church, which thrusts itself under this apostle's patronage, and claims her power under him, would presume to exceed the degrees of it, which he acknowledged to possess himself?—But how ill are your expectations answered, when, instead of the humble declaration in the text,—"Ye men of Israel, marvel not at us, "as if our own power and holiness had wrought "this;"—you hear a language and behaviour from the Romish court, as opposite to it as insolent words and actions can frame;—

So that, instead of "Ye men of Israel, marvel not "at us,"—Ye men of Israel, do marvel at us,—hold us in admiration. Approach our sacred pontiff, (who is not only holy, but holiness itself;) approach

his person with reverence, and deem it the greatest honour and happiness of your lives to fall down before his chair, and be admitted to kiss his feet.

Think not, as if it were not our own holiness which merits all the homage you can pay us. It is our own holiness, the superabundance of it, of which, having more than we know what to do with ourselves, from works of supererogation, we have transferred the surplus in ecclesiastick warehouses, and, in pure zeal for the good of your souls, have established publick banks of merit, ready to be drawn upon at all times.

Think not, ye men of Israel, or say within yourselves that we are unprofitable servants ;—we have no good works to spare ; or that, if we had, we cannot make this use of them ;—that we have no power to circulate our indulgences,—and huckster them out, as we do, through all the parts of Christendom. —Know ye by these presents, that it is our own power which does this,—the plenitude of our apostolick power operating with our own holiness, that enables us to bind and loose, as seems meet to us on earth ;—to save your souls or deliver them up to Satan ; and, as we please or displease, to indulge whole kingdoms at once, or excommunicate them all ;—binding kings in chains, and your nobles in links of iron.

That we may never again feel the effects of such language and principles,—may God of his mercy grant us. Amen.

SERMON XXXII.

THIRTIETH OF JANUARY.

EZRA IX. 6, 7.

And I said, O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God :—for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens.—Since the days of our fathers have we been in a great trespass unto this day.

THERE is not, I believe, throughout all history, an instance of so strange and obstinately corrupt a people as the Jews, of whom Ezra complains :—for though, on one hand, there never was a people that received so many testimonies of God's favour to encourage them to be good ;—so, on the other hand, there never was a people which so often felt the scourge of their iniquities, to dishearten them from doing evil.

And yet, neither the one nor the other seem'd ever able to make them either the wiser or better ; —neither God's blessings nor his corrections, could ever soften them ;—they still continued a thankless, unthinking people, who profited by no lessons, neither were to be won with mercies, nor terrified with punishments ; but, on every succeeding trial and occasion, extremely disposed against God, to go astray and act wickedly.

In the words of the text, the prophet's heart overflows with sorrow upon his reflection of this unwor-

thy part of their character; and the manner of his application to God is so expressive of his humble sense of it,—and there is something in the words so full of tenderness and shame for them upon that score,—as bespeaks the most paternal, as well as pastoral concern for them.—And he said,—"O my "God! I am ashamed;—and blush to lift up my "my face to thee, my God!"—No doubt the holy man was confounded to look back upon that long series of so many of God's undeserved mercies to them, of which they had made so bad and ungrateful a use:—he considered, that they had all the motives that could lay restraints either upon a considerate or a reasonable people;—that God had not only created, upheld, and favoured them with all advantages in common with the rest of their fellow-creatures,—but had been particularly kind to them;—that when they were in the house of bondage, in the most hopeless condition,—he had heard their cry, and took compassion upon their afflictions, and, by a chain of great and mighty deliverances, had set them free from the yoke of oppression.—The prophet, no doubt, reflected at the same time, that, besides this instance of God's goodness in first favouring their miraculous escape, a series of successes, not to be accounted for from second causes and the natural course of events, had crowned their heads in so remarkable a manner, as to afford an evident proof, not only of God's general concern, but of his particular providence and attachment to them, above all people.—In the wilderness he led them like sheep, and kept them as the apple of his eye;—he suffered no man to do them wrong, but reproved even kings for their sake;—that when

they entered into the promised land, no force was able to stand before them ;—when in possession, no army was ever able to drive them out ;—that nations, greater and mightier than they, were thrust forth from before them :—that, in a word, all nature for a time was driven backwards by the hands of God, to serve them ; and that even the sun itself had stood still in the midst of heaven, to secure their victories ;—that when all these mercies were cast away upon them,—and no principle of gratitude or interest could make them an obedient people,—God had tried by misfortunes to bring them back ;—that when instructions, warnings, invitations, miracles, prophets, and holy guides had no effect,—he at last suffered them to reap the wages of their folly, by letting them fall again into the same state of bondage in Babylon, from whence he had first raised them.—Here it is that Ezra pours out his confession.—It was no small aggravation to Ezra's concern, to find that even this last trial had no good effect upon their conduct ;—that all the alternatives of promises and threats, comforts and afflictions, instead of making them grow the better, made them apparently grow the worse. How could he intercede for them but with shame and sorrow !—and say, as in the text, " O my God ! I am ashamed, " and blush to lift up my face to thee !—for our in- " iquities are increased over our heads, and our tres- " pass is grown up unto the heavens.—Since the " days of our fathers have we been in a great tres- " pass unto this day."

Thus much for the prophet's humble confession to God for the Jews, for which he had but too just a foundation given by them ;—and I know not how

I can make a better use of the words, as the occasion of the day led me to the choice of them, than by a serious application of the same sad confession in regard to ourselves.

Our fathers, like those of the Jews in Ezra's time, no doubt have done amiss, and greatly provoked God by their violence ;—but if our own iniquities, like theirs, are increased over our heads ;—if, since the days of our fathers, we have been in a great trespass ourselves unto this day,—'tis fit this day, we should be put in mind of it ;—nor can the time and occasion be better employed, than in hearing with patience the reproofs which such a parallel will lead me to give.

It must be acknowledged, there is no nation which had ever so many extraordinary reasons and supernatural motives to become thankful and virtuous, as the Jews had ;—yet, at the same time, there is no one which has not sufficient (and setting aside at present the consideration of a future state as a reward for being so) there is no nation under heaven, which, besides the daily blessings of God's providence to them, but have received sufficient blessings and mercies at the hands of God to engage their best services, and the warmest returns of gratitude they can pay.—There has been a time, may be, when they have been delivered from some grievous calamity,—from the rage of pestilence or famine,—from the edge and fury of the sword,—from the fate and fall of kingdoms around them ;—they may have been preserved by providential discoveries, from plots and designs against the well-being of their states,—or by critical turns and revolutions in their favour when beginning to sink ;—

by some signal interposition of God's providence —they may have rescued their liberties, and all tha was dear to them, from the jaws of some tyrant ;— or may have preserved their religion pure and uncorrupted, when all other comforts failed them.

If other countries have reason to be thankful to God for any one of these mercies, much more has *this* of ours, which, at one time or other, hath received them all ; insomuch, that our history for this last century has scarce been any thing else but the history of our deliverances and God's blessings ;— and these in so complicated a chain, and with so little interruption, as to be scarce ever vouchsafed to any nation or language besides,—except the Jews ; —and with regard to them, though inferior in the stupendous manner of their working, yet no way so in the extensive goodness of their effects, and the infinite benevolence which must have wrought them for us.—Here then let us stop and look back a moment, and enquire, as in the case of the Jews, what great effects all this has had upon our lives ?—and how far worthy we have lived of what we have received ?

A stranger,—when we heard that this island had been so favoured by heaven,—so happy in our laws and religion,—so flourishing in our trade,—so blessed in our situation and natural product,—and in all of them so often,—so visibly protected by Providence,—would conclude, our gratitude and morals had kept pace with our blessings ;—and he would say,—as we are the most blessed and favoured, that we must be the most virtuous and religious people upon the face of the earth !

Would to God there was any other reason to incline one to so charitable a belief!—for, without running into any common-place declamation upon the wickedness of the age, we may say, within the bounds of truth,—That we have profited in this respect as little as was possible for the Jews;—that there is as little virtue, and as little sense of religion, at least as little of the appearance of it, as can be supposed to exist at all in a country where it is countenanced by the state.—Our forefathers, whatever greater degrees of real virtue they were possessed of,—God,—who searcheth the heart,—best knows;—but this is certain, in their days they had at least the form of godliness,—and paid this compliment to religion, as to wear at least the appearance and outward garb of it.—The publick service of God was better frequented, and in a devout as well as regular manner:—there was no open profaneness in our streets to put piety to the blush, or domestick ridicule to make her uneasy, and force her to withdraw.

Religion, though treated with freedom, was still treated with respect; the youth of both sexes kept under greater restraint; good order and good hours were then kept up in most families; and, in a word, a greater strictness and sobriety of manners maintained throughout amongst people of all ranks and conditions:—so that vice, however secretly it might be practised,—was ashamed to be seen.

But all this has insensibly been borne down ever since the days of our forefathers trespass; when, to avoid one extreme, we began to run into another;—so that, instead of any great religion amongst us, you see thousands who are tired even of the form of

it, and who have at length thrown the mask of it aside, as an useless incumbrance.

But this licentiousness, he would say, may be chiefly owing to a long course of prosperity, which is apt to corrupt mens minds.—God has since this tried you with afflictions ;—you have been visited with a long and expensive war :—God has sent, moreover, a pestilence amongst your cattle, which has cut off the stock from the fold,—and left no herd in the stalls.—Surely, he'll say, two such terrible scourges must have awakened the consciences of the most unthinking part of you, and forced the inhabitants of your land—from such admonitions,—although they failed with the Jews, to have learnt righteousness for themselves.

I own this is the natural effect,—and one would hope should always be the natural use and improvement from such calamities ;—for we often find that numbers who, in prosperity, seem to forget God, do yet remember him in the day of trouble and distress. —Yet consider this nationally, we see no such effect from it, in fact, as one would be led to expect from the speculation :—for instance,—with all the devastation, bloodshed, and expense which the war has occasioned,—How many converts has it made to frugality, to virtue, or even to seriousness itself ! —The pestilence amongst our cattle ; though it has distressed and utterly undone so many thousands, yet what one visible alteration has it made in the course of our lives !

And though one would imagine that the necessary drains of taxes for the one,—and the loss of rents and property from the other, should, in some measure, have withdrawn the means of gratifying our

passions, as we have done, yet, what appearance is there amongst us that it is so ?

What one fashionable folly or extravagance has been checked by it ?—Is not there the same luxury and epicurism of entertainments at our tables ?—Do we not pursue with eagerness the same giddy round of trifling diversions ?—Is not the infection diffused amongst people of all ranks, and all ages ?—and even grey hairs, whose sober example and manners ought to check the extravagant sallies of the thoughtless, gay, and unexperienced,—too often totter under the same costly ornaments, and join the general riot ! Where vanity, like this, governs the heart, even charity will allow us to suppose, that a consciousness of their inability to pursue greater excesses, is the only vexation of spirit.—In truth, the observation falls in with the main intention of the discourse ; which is not framed to flatter your follies,—but plainly to point them out, and shew you the general corruption of manners and want of religion ;—which all men see,—and which the wise and good so much lament.

But the inquirer will naturally go on, and say, that though this representation does not answer his expectations, that undoubtedly we must have profited by these lessons in other respects ;—that though we have not approved our understanding in the sight of God, by a virtuous use of our misfortunes, to true wisdom, that we must have improved them, however, to political wisdom :—so that he would say, Though the English do not appear to be a religious people, —they are at least a loyal one :—they have so often felt the scourge of rebellion, and have tasted so much sharp fruit from it, as to have set their teeth on edge

forever !—But, good God ! how would he be astonished to find, that though we have been so often toss'd to and fro by our own tempestuous humours, that we were not yet sick of the storm ;—that though we solemnly, on every return of this day, lament the guilt of our forefathers in staining their hands in blood, we never once think of our principles and practices which tend the same way :—and though the providence of God has set bounds, that they do not work as much mischief as in days of distraction and desolation,—little reason have we to ascribe the merit thereof to our own wisdom ;—so that, when the whole account is stated betwixt us,—there seems nothing to prevent the application of the words in the text :— " that our iniquities are increased over our " heads, and our trespass is grown up unto the heav- " ens.—Since the days of our fathers have we been in " a great trespass unto this day ;"—and though it is fit and becoming that we weep for them,—'tis much more so that we weep for ourselves,—that we lament our own corruptions, and the little advantages we have made of the mercies or chastisements of God, or from the sins and provocations of our forefathers.

This is the fruit we are to gather in a day of such humiliation ;—and unless it produces that for us, by a reformation of our manners, and by turning us from the error of our ways,—the service of this day is more a senseless insult upon the memories of our ancestors, than an honest design to profit by their mistakes and misfortunes, and to become wiser and better from our reflections upon them.

Till this is done, it avails little, though we pray fervently to God not to lay their sins to our charge, whilst we have so many remaining of our own.—

Unless we are touched for ourselves, how can we expect he should hear our cry! It is the wicked corruption of a people which they are to thank for whatever natural calamities they feel:—this is the very state we are in; which, by disengaging Providence from taking our part,—will always leave a people exposed to the whole force of accidents, both from within and without:—and however statesmen may dispute about the causes of the growth or decay of kingdoms,—it is for this cause a matter of eternal truth,—that as virtue and religion are our only recommendation to God,—that they are, consequently, the only true basis of our happiness and prosperity on earth:—and however we may shelter ourselves under distinctions of party,—that a wicked man is the worst enemy the state has;—and, for the contrary, it will always be found, that a virtuous man is the best patriot, and the best subject the king has!—and though an individual may say, What will my righteousness profit a nation of men?—I answer,—If it fail of a blessing here (which is not likely) it will have one advantage,—it will save thy own soul, and give thee that peace at the last, which this world cannot take away!

Which God, of his infinite mercy, grant us all! Amen.

SERMON XXXIII.

ROMANS II. 4.

Despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering,—not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?——

So says St. Paul. And

ECCLESIASTES VIII. 11.

Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the hearts of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.

TAKE either as you like it, you will get nothing by the bargain.

'Tis a terrible character of the world, which Solomon is here accounting for,—that their hearts were fully set in them to do evil.—And the general outcry against the wickedness of the age, in every age from Solomon's down to this, shews but too lamentably what grounds have all along been given for the complaint.

The disorder and confusion arising in the affairs of the world, from the wickedness of it, being ever such,—so evidently seen, so severely felt, as naturally to induce every one who was a spectator or a sufferer, to give the melancholy preference to the times he lived in, as if the corruptions of mens manners had not only exceeded the reports of former days, but the power almost of rising above the pitch to which the wickedness of the age was arrived.—How

far they may have been deceived in such calculations I shall not inquire ;—let it suffice, that mankind have ever been bad,—considering what motives they have had to be better ;—and, taking this for granted, instead of declaiming against it, let us see whether a discourse may not be as serviceable, by endeavouring, as Solomon has here done, rather to give an account of it, and, by tracing back the evils to their first principles, to direct ourselves to the true remedy against them.

Let it here only be premised,—that the wickedness either of the present or past times, whatever scandal and reproach it brings upon Christians,—ought not, in reason, to reflect dishonour upon Christianity, which is so apparently well framed to make us good; —that there is not a greater paradox in nature— than that so good a religion should be no better recommended by its professors.—Though this may seem a paradox,—'tis still, I say, no objection, though it has often been made use of against Christianity ;— since, if the morals of men are not reformed, it is not owing to a defect in the revelation, but 'tis owing to the same causes which defeated all the use and intent of reason, before revelation was given ;— for, setting aside the obligations which a divine law lays upon us,—whoever considers the state and condition of human nature, and, upon this view, how much stronger the natural motives are to virtue than to vice, would expect to find the world much better than it is, or ever has been !—For who would suppose the generality of mankind to betray so much folly, as to act against the common interest of their own kind, as every man does who yields to the temptation of what is wrong ?—But, on the other side,—

if men first look into the practice of the world, and there observe the strange prevalency of vice, and how willing men are to defend as well as to commit it,—one would think they believed that all discourses of virtue and honesty were mere matter of speculation for men to entertain some idle hours with ; —and say truly, that men seemed universally to be agreed in nothing but in speaking well and doing ill.—But this casts no more dishonour upon reason than it does upon revelation ;—the truth of the case being this,—That no motives have been great enough to restrain those from sin who have secretly loved it, and only sought pretences for the practice of it ;—so that, if the light of the gospel has not left a sufficient provision against the wickedness of the world,—the true answer is, that there can be none. —'Tis sufficient that the excellency of Christianity in doctrine and precepts, and its proper tendency to make us virtuous as well as happy, is a strong evidence of its divine original ;—and these advantages it has above any institution that ever was in the world :—it gives the best directions, the best examples, the greatest encouragements, the best helps, and the greatest obligations to gratitude.—But as religion was not to work upon men by way of force and natural necessity,—but by moral persuasion,—which sets good and evil before them ;—so, if men have power to do evil, or choose the good, and will abuse it, this cannot be avoided ;—not only religion, but even reason itself, must necessarily imply a freedom of choice ; and all the beings in the world which have it, were created free to stand or free to fall ;—and, therefore, men that will not be wrought upon by this way of address, must expect

and be contented, to feel the stroke of that rod which is prepared for the back of fools, oft-times in this world, but undoubtedly in the next, from the hands of a righteous Governor, who will finally render to every man according to his works.

Because this sentence is not always executed speedily, is the wise man's account of the general licentiousness which prevailed through the race of mankind—so early as his days; and we may allow it a place amongst the many other fatal causes of depravation in our own;—a few of which I shall beg leave to add to this explication of the wise man's; subjoining a few practical cautions in relation to each, as I go along.

To begin with Solomon's account in the text,—that, because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the hearts of the sons of men are fully set in them to do evil.

It seems somewhat hard to understand the consequence why men should grow more desperately wicked—because God is merciful, and gives them space to repent.—This is no natural effect,—nor does the wise man intend to insinuate that the goodness and long-suffering of God is the cause of the wickedness of man, by a direct efficacy to harden sinners in their course.—But the scope of his discourse is this, Because a vitious man escapes at present, he is apt to draw false conclusions from it, and, from the delay of God's punishments in this life, either to conceive them at so remote a distance, or perhaps so uncertain, that though he has some doubtful misgivings of the future, yet he hopes, in the main, that his fears are greater than his danger;—and, from observing some of the worst of men both

live and die without any outward testimony of God's wrath,—draws from thence some flattering ground of encouragement for himself, and, with the wicked in the psalm says in his heart, Tush, I shall never be cast down, there shall no harm happen unto me: —as if it was necessary, if God is to punish at all, that he must do it presently;—which, by the way, would rather seem to bespeak the rage and fury of an incensed party, than the determination of a wise and patient Judge,—who respites punishment to another state, declaring, for the wisest reasons, this is not the time for it to take place in,—but that he has appointed a day for it, wherein he will judge the world in righteousness, and make such unalterable distinctions betwixt the good and bad,—as to render his future judgment a full vindication of his justice.

That mankind have ever made an ill use of this forbearance, is, and, I fear, will ever be the case:— and St. Peter, in his description of the scoffers in the latter days, who, he tells us, shall walk after their own lusts (the worst of all characters) gives the same sad solution of what should be their unhappy encouragement;—for that they would say,— where is the promise [where is the threatening or declaration of η' επαγγελια] of his coming?—for, since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation;—that is, the world goes on in the same uninterrupted course, where all things fall alike to all, without any interposition from above,—or any outward token of divine displeasure:—upon this ground, "Come ye," say they, as the prophet represents them, "I will "fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong

" drink ; and to-morrow shall be as this day, and " much more abundant."

Now, if you consider, you will find that all this false way of reasoning doth arise from that gross piece of self-flattery, that such do imagine God to be like themselves ;—that is, as cruel and revengeful as they are ;—and they presently think, if a fellow-creature offended them at the rate that sinners are said to offend God, and they had as much power in their hands to punish and torture them as he has, they would be sure to execute it speedily ;—but, because they see God does it not, therefore they conclude, that all the talk of God's anger against vice, and his future punishment of it,—is mere talk, calculated for the terror of old women and children. —Thus speak they peace to their souls, when there is no peace ;—for though a sinner (which the wise man adds by way of caution after the text)—for though a sinner do evil a hundred times, and his days be prolonged upon the earth,—yet sure I know, that it shall be well with them that fear God ;—but shall not be well with the wicked.—Upon which argument, the psalmist, speaking in the name of God, —uses this remonstrance to one under this fatal mistake, which has misled thousands :—" These things " thou didst, and I kept silence."—And it seems this silence was interpreted into consent ;—for it follows,— " and thou thoughtest I was altogether " such a one as thyself ;"—but the psalmist adds, how ill he took this at mens hands, and that they should not know the difference between the forbearance of sinners and his neglect of their sins ;—" but " I will reprove thee, and set them in order before " thee."—Upon the whole of which, he bids them

be better advised, and consider, lest, while they forget God, he pluck them away, and there be none to deliver them.

Thus much for the first ground and cause which the text gives, why the hearts of the sons of men are so fully set in them to do evil;—upon which I have only one or two cautions to add,—that, in the first place, we frequently deceive ourselves in the calculation that sentence shall not be speedily executed.—By sad experience, vitious and debauched men find this matter to turn out very different in practice from their expectations in theory; God having so contrived the nature of things throughout the whole system of moral duties, that every vice, in some measure, should immediately revenge itself upon the doer;—that falsehood and unfair dealing ends in distrust and dishonour;—that drunkenness and debauchery should weaken the thread of life, and cut it so short, that the transgressor shall not live out half his days;—that pride should be followed by mortifications;—extravagance by poverty and distress;—that the revengeful and malicious should be the greatest tormentor of himself,—the perpetual disturbance of his own mind being so immediate a chastisement, as to verify what the wise man says upon it,—that, as the merciful man does good to his own soul, so he that is cruel troubleth his own flesh.

In all which cases there is a punishment independent of these,—and that is, the punishment which a man's own mind takes upon itself, from the remorse of doing what is wrong. *Prima est hæc ultio*,—this is the first revenge which (whatever other punishments he may escape) is sure to follow close upon his heels, and haunts him wherever he goes;—for

whenever a man commits a wilful bad action,—he drinks down poison, which, though it may work slowly, will work surely, and give him perpetual pains and heart-aches,—and, if no means be used to expel it, will destroy him at last;—so that, notwithstanding that final sentence of God is not executed speedily, in exact weight and measure,—there is, nevertheless, a sentence executed, which a man's own conscience pronounces against him;—and every wicked man, I believe, feels as regular a process within his own breast commenced against himself, and finds himself as much accused, and as evidently and impartially condemned for what he has done amiss, as if he had received sentence before the most awful tribunal;—which judgment of conscience, as it can be looked upon in no other light but as an anticipation of that righteous and unalterable sentence which will be pronounced hereafter by that Being to whom he is finally to give an account of his actions,—I cannot conceive the state of his mind under any character than of that anxious doubtfulness described by the prophet,— "That the wicked are "like the troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose "waters cast up mire and filth."

A second caution against this uniform ground of false hope, in sentence not being executed speedily, will arise from this consideration,—That, in our vain calculation of this distant point of retribution, we generally respite it to the day of judgment and, as that may be a thousand or ten thousand years off, it proportionably lessens the terror.—To rectify this mistake, we should first consider, that the distance of a thing no way alters the nature of it.—2dly, That we are deceived in this distant prospect,

not considering that, however far off we may fix it in this belief, that, in fact, it is no farther off from every man than the day of his own death ;—and how certain that day is, we need not surely be reminded ;—'tis the certainty of the matter, and of an event which will as surely come to pass as that the sun shall rise to-morrow morning,—that should enter as much into our calculations as if it was hanging over our heads ;—for though, in our fond imaginations, we dream of living many years upon the earth,—how unexpectedly are we summoned from it !—How oft, in the strength of our age, in the midst of our projects,—when we are promising ourselves the ease of many years !—how oft, at that very time, and in the height of this imagination, is the decree sealed, and the commandment gone forth to call us into another world !

This may suffice for the examination of this one great cause of the corruption of the world ;—from whence I should proceed, as I purposed, to an inquiry after some other unhappy causes which have a share in this evil.

But I have taken up so much more of your time in this than I first intended,—that I shall defer what I have to say to the next occasion, and put an end to this discourse, by an answer to a question often asked relative to this argument, in prejudice of Christianity, which cannot be more seasonably answered than in a discourse at this time ;—and that is,—Whether the christian religion has done the world any service in reforming the lives and morals of mankind,—which some, who pretend to have considered the present state of vice, seem to doubt

of ?—This objection I, in some measure, have anticipated in the beginning of this discourse ;—and, what I have to add to that argument is this,—That, as it is impossible to decide the point by evidence of facts, which, at so great a distance, cannot be brought together and compared,—it must be decided by reason and the probability of things ; upon which issue, one might appeal to the most professed deist, and trust him to determine,—whether the lives of those who are set loose from all obligations but those of conveniency,—can be compared with those who have been blessed with the extraordinary light of a religion ?—and whether so just and holy a religion as the christian, which sets restraints even upon our thoughts,—a religion which gives us the most engaging ideas of the perfections of God, —at the same time that it impresses the most awful ones of his majesty and power ;—a Being rich in mercies, but, if they are abused, terrible in his judgments ;—one constantly about our secret paths, —about our beds ;—who spieth out all our ways,—noticeth all our actions, and is so pure in his nature, that he will punish even the wicked imaginations of the heart, and has appointed a day wherein he will enter into this enquiry, and execute judgment according as we have deserved ?——

If either the hopes or fears, the passions or reason of men are to be wrought upon at all, such principles must have an effect, though, I own, very far short of what a thinking man should expect from such motives.

No doubt, there is great room for amendment in the christian world ;—and the professors of our holy religion may, in general, be said to be a very cor-

rupt and bad generation of men,—considering what reasons and obligations they have to be better.—Yet still I affirm, if those restraints were lessened,—the world would be infinitely worse ;—and, therefore, we cannot sufficiently bless and adore the goodness of God for those advantages, brought by the coming of Christ ;—which God grant that we may live to be more deserving of ;—that, in the last day, when he shall come again to judge the world, we may rise to to life immortal. Amen.

SERMON XXXIV.

TRUST IN GOD.

PSAL. XXXVII. 3.

Put thou thy trust in the Lord.

WHOEVER seriously reflects upon the state and condition of man, and looks upon that dark side of it, which represents his life as open to so many causes of trouble ;—when he sees how often he eats the bread of affliction, and that he is born to it as naturally as the sparks fly upwards :—that no rank or degrees of men are exempted from this law of our beings : but that all, from the high cedar of Libanus to the humble shrub upon the wall, are shook in their turns by numberless calamities and distresses :—when one sits down and looks upon this gloomy side of things, with all the sorrowful changes and chances which surround us,—at first sight, —would not one wonder, how the spirit of a man could bear the infirmities of his nature, and what it is that supports him as it does, under the many evil accidents which he meets with in his passage through this valley of tears ?—Without some certain aid within us to bear us up,—so tender a frame as ours would be but ill fitted to encounter what generally befalls it in this rugged journey :—and accordingly we find, that we are so curiously wrought by an all-wise hand with a view to this, that, in the very composition and texture of our nature, there is a reme-

dy and provision left against most of the evils we suffer ;—we being so ordered, that the principle of self-love, given us for preservation, comes in here to our aid,—by opening a door of hope, and, in the worst emergencies, flattering us with a belief that we shall extricate ourselves, and live to see better days.

This expectation, though in fact it no way alters the nature of the cross accidents to which we lie open, or does at all pervert the course of them,—yet imposes upon the sense of them, and, like a secret spring in a well-contrived machine, though it cannot prevent, at least, it counterbalances the pressure, and so bears up this tottering, tender frame under many a violent shock and hard jostling, which otherwise would unavoidably overwhelm it. Without such an inward resource, from an inclination, which is natural to man, to trust and hope for redress in the most deplorable conditions,—his state in this life would be, of all creatures, the most miserable. When his mind was either wrung with affliction, or his body lay tortured with the gout or stone, did he think that in this world there should be no respite to his sorrow ;—could he believe the pains he endured would continue equally intense, without remedy,—without intermission,—with what deplorable lamentation would he languish out his day !—and how sweet, as Job says, would the "clods "of the valley be to him !" But so sad a persuasion, whatever grounds there may be sometimes for it, scarce ever gets full possession of the mind of man, which by nature struggles against despair ; so that, whatever part of us suffers, the darkest mind instantly ushers in this relief to it,—points out to hope,

—encourages to build, though on a sandy foundation, and raises an expectation in us, that things will come to a fortunate issue. And indeed it is something surprising to consider the strange force of this passion ;—what wonders it has wrought in supporting mens spirits in all ages, and under such inextricable difficulties, that they have sometimes hoped, as the apostle expresses it, even against hope,—against all likelihood !—and have looked forwards with comfort under misfortunes, when there has been little or nothing to favour such an expectation !

This flattering propensity in us, which I have here represented, as it is built upon one of the most deceitful of human passions (that is, self-love) which at all times inclines us to think better of ourselves and conditions than there is ground for ; how great soever the relief is which a man draws from it at present, it too often disappoints in the end, leaving him to go on his way sorrowing, mourning, as the prophet says, that his hope is lost ; so that, after all, in our severer trials, we still find a necessity of calling in something to aid this principle, and direct it so, that it may not wander with this uncertain expectation of what may never be accomplished, but fix itself upon a proper object of trust and reliance that is able to fulfil our desires, to hear our cry, and to help us. The passion of hope without this, though in straits a man may support his spirits for a time with a general expectation of better fortune,—yet, like a ship tossed, without a pilot, upon a troublesome sea, it may float upon the surface for a while, but is never, never likely to be brought to the haven where it would be. To accomplish this, reason and religion are called in at length, and join

with nature in exhorting us to hope ; but to hope in God, in whose hands are the issues of life and death ; and without whose knowledge and permission, we know that not a hair of our heads can fall to the ground. Strengthened with this anchor of hope, which keeps us steadfast when the rains descend, and the floods come upon us,—however the sorrows of a man are multiplied, he bears up his head, looks towards heaven with confidence, waiting for the salvation of God : he then builds upon a rock against which the gates of hell cannot prevail. He may be troubled, it is true, on every side, but shall not be distressed ; perplexed, yet not in despair. Though he walks through the valley of the shadow of death, even then he fears no evil ; this rod and this staff comfort him.

The virtue of this had been sufficiently tried by David, and had, no doubt, been of use to him in the course of a life full of afflictions ; many of which were so great, that he declares, that he should verily have fainted under the sense and apprehension of them, but that he believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. He believed !—How could he do otherwise ? He had all the conviction that reason and inspiration could give him, —that there was a Being, in whom every thing concurred which could be the proper object of trust and confidence ;—power to help, and goodness always to incline him to do it.—He knew this infinite Being, though his dwelling was so high, that his glory was above the heavens, yet humbled himself to behold the things that are done in heaven and earth ;—that he was not an idle and distant spectator of what passed there, but that he was a present help in time of trouble ;—that he

bow'd the heavens and came down, to overrule the course of things ; delivering the poor, and him that was in misery, from him that was too strong for him ; lifting the simple out of his distress, and guarding him by his providence, so that no man should do him wrong :—" that neither the sun " should smite him by day, neither the moon by " night."—Of this the psalmist had such evidence from his observation on the life of others, with the strongest conviction, at the same time, which a long life full of personal deliverances could give ; all which taught him the value of the lesson in the text, from which he had received so much encouragement himself, that he transmits it for the benefit of the whole race of mankind after him, to support them, as it had done him, under the afflictions which befell him.

" Trust in God :"—as if he had said, Whosoever thou art that shall fall into any such straits or troubles as I have experienced, learn by my example where to seek for succour ;—trust not in princes, nor in any child of man, for there is no help in them : —the sons of men who are of low degree are vanity, and are not able to help thee ; men of high degree are a lie,—too often deceive thy hopes, and will not help thee :—but thou, when thy soul is in heaviness, turn thy eyes from the earth, and look up towards heaven, to that infinitely kind and powerful Being, who neither slumbereth nor sleepeth ; who is a present help in time of trouble :—despond not, and say within thyself—why his chariot wheels stay so long? —and why he vouchsafeth thee not a speedy relief? —but arm thyself in thy misfortunes with patience and fortitude ;—trust in God, who sees all those

conflicts under which thou labourest,—who knows thy necessities afar off,—and puts all thy tears into his bottle ;—who sees every careful thought and pensive look ;—and hears every sigh and melancholy groan thou utterest.

In all thy exigencies, trust and depend on him ; —nor ever doubt but he, who heareth the cry of the fatherless, and defendeth the cause of the widow, if it is just, will hear thine, and either lighten thy burden, and let thee go free ;—or, which is the same, if that seems not meet, by adding strength to thy mind, to enable thee to sustain what he has suffered to be laid upon thee.

Whoever recollects the particular psalms said to be composed by this great man, under the several distresses and cross accidents of his life, will perceive the justice of this paraphrase, which is agreeable to the strain of reasoning—which runs through, —and is little else than a recollection of his own words and thoughts upon those occasions ; in all which he appears to have been no less signal in his afflictions than in his piety, and in that goodness of soul which he discovers under them.—I said, the reflections upon his own life and providential escapes, which he had experienced, had had a share in forming these religious sentiments of trust in his mind which had so early taken root, that when he was going to fight the Philistine,—when he was but a youth and stood before Saul,—he had already learned to argue in this manner :—Let no man's heart fail him ;—" thy servant kept his father's " sheep, and there came a lion and a bear, and took " a lamb out of the flock ; and I went out after him " and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth :

" and when he arose against me, I caught him by " the beard, and smote him, and slew him ;—thy " servant slew both the lion and the bear ;—and this " uncircumcised Philistine will be as one of them ; " —for the Lord, who delivered me out of the paw " of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear,—he will " deliver me out of his hand."—

The conclusion was natural, and the experience which every man has had of God's former loving-kindness and protection to him, either in dangers or distress, does unavoidably engage him to think in the same train.—It is observable that the apostle St. Paul, encouraging the Corinthians to bear with patience the trials incident to human nature, reminds them of the deliverances that God did formerly vouchsafe to him and his fellow-labourers, Gaius and Aristarchus*;—and on that ground builds a rock of encouragement, for future trust and dependence on him.—His life had been in very great jeopardy at Ephesus,—where he had like to have been brought out to the theatre, to be devoured by wild beasts, and indeed had no human means to avert,—and consequently to escape it ;—and therefore, he tells them, that he had this advantage by it,—That the more he believed he should be put to death, the more he was engaged by his deliverance, never to depend on any worldly trust, but only on God, who can rescue from the greatest extremity ; even from the grave and death itself.—" For we would not, " brethren, says he, have you ignorant of our trouble, " which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed " out of measure, above our strength, insomuch, " that we despaired even of life ;—but we had the " sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not " trust in ourselves, but in God, who raiseth the

"dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and "doth deliver, and in whom we trust that he will "still deliver us."

And indeed a stronger argument cannot be brought for future trust, than the remembrance of past protection;—for what ground or reason can I have to distrust the kindness of that person who has always been my friend and benefactor?

On whom can I better rely for assistance in the day of my distress, than on him who stood by me in all mine affliction?—and, when I was at the brink of destruction, delivered me out of all my troubles? Would it not be highly ungrateful, and reflect either upon his goodness or his sufficiency, to distrust that Providence which has always had a watchful eye over me?—and who, according to his gracious promises, will never leave me, nor forsake me; and who in all my wants, in all my emergencies, has been abundantly more willing to give than I to ask it?—If the former and the latter rain have hitherto descended upon the earth in due season, and seed-time and harvest have never yet failed,—why should I fear famine in the land, or doubt, but that he who feedeth the raven, and providently catereth for the sparrow, should likewise be my comfort?—How unlikely is it that ever he should suffer his truth to fail!—This train of reflection, from the consideration of past mercies, is suitable and natural to all mankind;—there being no one, who by calling to mind God's kindnesses, which have been ever of old, but will see cause to apply the argument to himself.

And though, in looking back upon the events which have befallen us, we are apt to attribute too

much to the arm of flesh, in recounting the more successful parts of them, saying,—My wisdom, my parts, and address, extricated me from this misfortune ;—my foresight and penetration saved me from a second ;—my courage, and the mightiness of my strength, carried me through a third :—however we are accustomed to talk in this manner,—yet, whoever coolly sits down and reflects upon the many accidents (though very improperly called so) which have befallen him in the course of his life ;—when he considers the many amazing turns in his favour, sometimes in the most unpromising cases,—and often brought about by the most unlikely causes ;—when he remembers the particular providences which have gone along with him,—the many personal deliverances which have preserved him,—the unaccountable manner in which he has been enabled to get through difficulties, which on all sides beset him at one time of his life, or the strength of mind he found himself endowed with to encounter afflictions which fell upon him at another period,—where is the man, I say, who looks back with the least religious sense upon what has thus happened to him, who could not give you sufficient proofs of God's power, and his arm over him, and recount several cases wherein the God of Jacob was his help, and the Holy One of Israel his redeemer !

Hast thou ever lain upon the bed of languishing, or laboured under a grievous distemper which threatened thy life ? Call to mind thy sorrowful and pensive spirit at that time ; and add to it, who it was that had mercy on thee, that brought thee out of darkness and the shadow of death, and made all thy bed in thy sickness.

Hath the scantiness of thy condition hurried thee into great straits and difficulties, and brought thee almost to distraction? Consider who it was that spread thy table in that wilderness of thought!—who it was that made thy cup to overflow!—who added a friend of consolation to thee, and thereby spake peace to thy troubled mind!—Hast thou ever sustained any considerable damage in thy stock or trade? Bethink thyself who it was that gave thee a serene and contented mind under those losses.—If thou hast recovered, consider who it was that repaired those breaches when thy own skill and endeavours failed!—call to mind whose providence has blessed them since,—whose hand it was that has since set a hedge about thee, and made all that thou hast done to prosper!—Hast thou ever been wounded in thy more tender part, through the loss of an obliging husband?—or hast thou been torn away from the embraces of a dear and promising child, by his unexpected death?

O consider, whether the God of truth did not approve himself a father to thee when fatherless!—or a husband to thee when a widow!—and has either given thee a name better than of sons and daughters, or even beyond thy hope, made thy remaining tender branches to grow up tall and beautiful, like the cedars of Libanus!

Strengthened by these considerations, suggesting the same or like past deliverances, either to thyself, thy friends, or acquaintance, thou wilt learn this great lesson in the text, in all thy exigencies and distresses,—to trust God; and whatever befalls thee in the many changes and chances of this mor-

tal life, to speak comfort to thy soul, and to say, in the words of Habakkuk the prophet, with which I conclude,—

"Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither "shall fruit be in the vines;—although the labour "of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no "meat;—although the flock shall be cut off from "the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls,— "yet we will rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God "of our salvation!"

To whom be all honour and glory, now and forever. Amen.

SERMON XXXV.

AGAINST THE CRIME OF MURDER.

EXODUS XXI. 14.

But if a man come presumptuously upon his neighbour, to slay him with guile,—thou shalt take him from my altar, that he may die

As the end and happy result of society was our mutual protection from the depredations which malice and avarice lay us open to,—so have the laws of God laid proportionable restraints against such violations as would defeat us of such a security.—Of all other attacks which can be made against us, that of a man's life, which is his all, being the greatest, —the offence, in God's dispensation to the Jews, was denounced as the most heinous,—and represented as most unpardonable.—"At the hand of every "man's brother will I require the life of man.— "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his "blood be shed.—Ye shall take no satisfaction for "the life of a murderer;—he shall surely be put to "death.—So ye shall not pollute the land wherein "ye are,—for blood defileth the land;—and the land "cannot be cleansed of blood that is shed therein, "but by the blood of him that shed it."—For this reason, by the laws of all civilized nations, in all parts of the globe, it has been punished with death.

Some civilized and wise communities have so far incorporated these severe dispensations into their municipal laws, as to allow of no distinction betwixt

murder and homicide,—at least, in the penalty;—leaving the intentions of the several parties concerned in it to that Being who knows the heart, and will adjust the differences of the case hereafter.—This falls, no doubt, heavy upon particulars;—but it is urged for the benefit of the whole.—It is not the business of a preacher to enter into an examination of the grounds and reasons for so seeming a severity.—Where most severe,—they have proceeded, no doubt, from an excess of abhorrence of a crime,—which is, of all others, most terrible and shocking in its own nature,—and the most direct attack and stroke at society,—as the security of a man's life was the first protection of society,—the ground-work of all the other blessings to be desired from such a compact.—Thefts,—oppressions,—exactions,—and violences of that kind, cut off the branches;—this smote the root;—all perished with it:—the injury irreparable:—no after-act could make amends for it—What recompense can he give to a man in exchange for his life?—What satisfaction to the widow,—the fatherless,—to the family,—the friends,—the relations,—cut off from his protection,—and rendered, perhaps, destitute!—perhaps miserable forever!

No wonder that, by the law of nature,—this crime was always pursued with the most extreme vengeance;—which made the barbarians to judge, when they saw St. Paul upon the point of dying a sudden and terrifying death,—"No doubt, this man is a "murderer; who, though he has escaped the sea, "yet vengeance suffereth not to live."

The censure there was rash and uncharitable; but the honest detestation of the crime was upper-

most.—They saw a dreadful punishment,—they thought;—and in seeing the one, they suspected the other:—and the vengeance which had overtaken the holy man, was meant by them the vengeance and punishment of the Almighty Being, whose providence and honour was concerned in pursuing him from the place he had fled from to that island.

The honour and authority of God is most evidently struck at, most certainly, in every such crime,—and, therefore, he would pursue it;—it being the reason (in the ninth of Genesis) upon which the prohibition of murder is grounded;—for "in the image "of God created he man:"—as if to attempt the life of a man had something in it peculiarly daring and audacious;—not only shocking as to its consequence above all other crimes,—but of personal violence and indignity against God, the author of our life and death.—That it is the highest act of injustice to man, and which will admit of no compensation,—I have said.—But the depriving a man of life, does not comprehend the whole of his suffering; he may be cut off in an unprovided or disordered condition, with regard to the great account betwixt himself and his Maker:—he may be under the power of irregular passions and desires.—The best of men are not always upon their guard:—and I am sure we have all reason to join in that affecting part of our litany,—That, amongst other evils,—God would deliver us from sudden death;—that we may have some foresight of that period, to compose our spirits,—prepare our accounts,—and put ourselves in the best posture we can to meet it; for, after we are most prepared,—it is a terror to human nature!

The people of some nations are said to have a peculiar art in poisoning, by slow and gradual advances.—In this case,—however horrid,—it savours of mercy with regard to our spiritual state;—for the sensible decays of nature, which a sufferer must feel within him from the secret workings of the horrid drug,—give warning, and shew that mercy which the bloody hand that comes upon his neighbour suddenly, and slays him with guile,—has denied him.—It may serve to admonish him of the duty of repentance, and to make his peace with God whilst he had time and opportunity.—The speedy execution of justice, which, as our laws now stand, and which were intended for that end,—must strike the greater terror upon that account.—Short as the interval between sentence and death is,—it is long, compared to the case of the murdered.—Thou allowedst the man no time,—said the judge to a late criminal, in a most affecting manner;—thou allowedst him not a moment to prepare for eternity!—and to one who thinks at all,—it is, of all reflections and self-accusations, the most heavy and unsurmountable,—That, by the hand of violence, a man in a perfect state of health,—whilst he walks out in perfect security, as he thinks, with his friends;—perhaps whilst he is sleeping soundly,—to be hurried out of the world by the assassin!—by a sudden stroke,—to find himself at the bar of God's justice, without notice and preparation for his trial!—'tis most horrible!

Though he be really a good man (and, it is to be hoped, God makes merciful allowances in such cases)—yet it is a terrifying consideration at the best;—and, as the injury is greater,—there are also very aggravating circumstances relating to the per-

son who commits this act;—as when it is the effect not of a rash and sudden passion, which sometimes disorders and confounds reason for a moment,—but of a deliberate and propense design or malice.—When the sun not only goes down, but rises upon his wrath;—when he sleeps not till he has struck the stroke!—when, after he has had time and leisure to recollect himself,—and consider what he is going to do;—when, after all the checks of conscience,—the struggles of humanity,—the recoilings of his own blood at the thoughts of shedding another man's,—he shall persist still,—and resolve to do it!—Merciful God! protect us from doing or suffering such evils!—Blessed be thy name and providence, which seldom or ever suffers it to escape with impunity!—In vain does the guilty flatter himself with hopes of secrecy or impunity: the eye of God is always upon him.—Whither can he fly from his presence!—By the immensity of his nature, he is present in all places!—by the infinity of it, to all times!—by his omniscience, to all thoughts, words, and actions of men!—By an emphatical phrase in scripture, the blood of the innocent is said to cry to heaven from the ground for vengeance;—and it was for this reason,—that he might be brought to justice,—that he was debarred the benefit of any asylum and the cities of refuge:—for the elders of his city shall send and fetch him thence, and deliver him into the hand of the avenger of blood;—and their eye should not pity him.

The text says,—"Thou shalt take him from my "altar, that he may die."—It had been a very ancient imagination, that for men guilty of this and other horrid crimes,—a place held sacred, as dedi-

cated to God, was a refuge and protection to them from the hands of justice.—The law of God cuts the transgressor off from all delusive hopes of this kind; —and I think the Romish church has very little to boast of in the sanctuaries which she leaves open for this and other crimes and irregularities :—sanctuaries which are often the first temptations to wickedness, and therefore bring the greater scandal and dishonour to her that authorizes her pretensions.

Every obstruction of the course of justice—is a door opened to betray society, and bereave us of those blessings which it has in view.—To stand up for the privileges of such places, is to invite men to sin with a bribe of impunity.—It is a strange way of doing honour to God, to screen actions which are a disgrace to humanity !

What scripture and all civilized nations teach concerning the crime of taking away another man's life,—is applicable to the wickedness of a man's attempting to bereave himself of his own.—He has no more right over it, than over that of others:— and whatever false glosses have been put upon it by men of bad heads or bad hearts,—it is at the bottom a complication of cowardice, and wickedness, and weakness ;—is one of the fatalest mistakes desperation can hurry a man into ;—inconsistent with all the reasoning and religion of the world, and irreconcileable with that patience under afflictions,—that resignation and submission to the will of God in all straits which is required of us.—But if our calamities are brought upon ourselves by a man's own wickedness,—still has he less to urge,—least reason has he to renounce the protection of God,—when he most stands in need of it, and of his mercy.

But as I intend the subject of self-murder for my discourse next Sunday,—I shall not anticipate what I have to say, but proceed to consider some other cases, in which the law relating to the life of our neighbour is transgressed in different degrees :—all which are generally spoken of under the subject of murder,—and considered by the best casuists as a species of the same,—and, in justice to the subject, cannot be passed here.

St. John says, "Whosoever hateth his brother is "a murderer :"—it is the first step to this sin ;—and our Saviour, in his sermon upon the Mount, has explained in how many slighter and unsuspected ways and degrees—the command in the law,—"Thou shalt do no murder," may be opposed, if not broken.—All real mischiefs and injuries maliciously brought upon a man, to the sorrow and disturbance of his mind,—eating out the comfort of his life, and shortening his days, are this sin in disguise ;—and the grounds of the Scripture expressing it with such severity, is,—that the beginnings of wrath and malice,—in event, often extend to such great and unforeseen effects, as, were we foretold them, we should give so little credit to, as to say,—"Is thy servant "a dog, that he should do this thing ?"—And though these beginnings do not necessarily produce the worst (God forbid they should !) yet they cannot be committed without these evil seeds are first sown :—as Cain's causeless anger (as Dr. Clark observes) against his brother,—to which the apostle alludes,—ended in taking away his life ;—and the best instructors teach us, that, to avoid a sin,—we must avoid the steps and temptations which lead to it.

This should warn us to free our minds from all tincture of avarice, and desire after what is another man's.—It operates the same way,—and has terminated too oft in the same crime ;—and it is the great excellency of the christian religion,—that it has an eye to this in the stress laid upon the first springs of evils in the heart ; rendering us accountable, not only for our words.—but the thoughts themselves, —if not checked in time, but suffered to proceed further than the first motions of concupiscence.

" Ye have heard, therefore (says our Saviour) that " it was said by them of old time,—Thou shalt not " kill ;—but I say unto you,—whosoever is angry " with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger " of the judgment ;—and whosoever shall say to his " brother, Raca,—shall be in danger of the council: " —but whosoever shall say, thou fool,—shall be in " danger of hell-fire." The interpretation of which I shall give you in the words of a great scripturist, Dr. Clark,—and is as follows :—That the three gradations of crimes are an allusion to the three different degrees of punishment, in the three courts of judicature amongst the Jews ;—and our Saviour's meaning was, That every degree of sin, from its first conception to its outrage,—every degree of malice and hatred, shall receive from God a punishment proportionable to the offence.—Whereas the old law, according to the Jewish interpretation, extended not to these things at all,—forbade only murder and outward injuries :—" Whosoever shall " say, thou fool, shall be in danger of hell-fire."— The sense which is, not that, in the strict and literal acceptation, every rash and passionate expression shall be punished with eternal damnation—(for who

then would be saved?)—but that at the exact account in the judgment of the great day, every secret thought and intent of the heart shall have its just estimation and weight in the degrees of punishment which shall be assigned to every one in his final state.

There is another species of this crime which is seldom taken notice of in discourses upon the subject, and yet can be reduced to no other class;—and that is, where the life of our neighbour is shortened,—and often taken away as directly as by a weapon, by the empirical sale of nostrums and quack medicines,—which ignorance and avarice blend.—The loud tongue of ignoranee impudently promises much,—and the ear of the sick is open;—and as many of these pretenders deal in edge-tools, too many, I fear, perish with the misapplication of them.

So great are the difficulties of tracing out the hidden causes of the evils to which this frame of ours are subject,—that the most candid of the profession have ever allowed and lamented how unavoidably they are in the dark:—so that the best medicines, administered with the wisest heads,—shall often do the mischief they were intended to prevent.—These are misfortunes to which we are subject in this state of darkness;—but when men, without skill,—without education,—without knowledge either of the distemper, or even of what they sell,—make merchandize of the miserable,—and, from a dishonest principle, trifle with the pains of the unfortunate,—too often with their lives; and from the mere motive of a dishonest gain,—every such instance of a person bereft of life by the hand of ignorance, can be considered in no other light than a branch of the same root,—it is murder in the true sense;—which,

though not cognizable by our laws,—by the laws of right, every man's own mind and conscience must appear equally black and detestable.

In doing what is wrong, we stand chargeable with all the bad consequences which arise from the action, whether foreseen or not :—and as the principal view of the empirick, in those cases, is not what he always pretends,—the good of the publick,—but the good of himself,—it makes the action what it is.

Under this head it may not be improper to comprehend all adulterations of medicines, wilfully made worse through avarice.—If a life is lost by such wilful adulterations,—and it may be affirmed, that, in many critical turns of an acute distemper, there is but a single cast left for the patient,—the trial and chance of a single drug in his behalf ; and if that has wilfully been adulterated, and wilfully despoiled of its best virtues,—what will the vender answer ?

May God grant we may all answer well for ourselves, that we may be finally happy ! Amen.

SERMON XXXVI.

SANCTITY OF THE APOSTLES.

MATTHEW XI. 6.

Blessed is he that shall not be offended in me.

THE general prejudices of the Jewish nation concerning the royal state and condition of the Saviour, who was to come into the world,—was "a stone of "stumbling, and a rock of offence," to the greatest part of that unhappy and prepossessed people, when the promise was actually fulfilled.—Whether it was altogether the traditions of their fathers,—or that the rapturous expressions of their prophets, which represented the Messiah's spiritual kingdom in such extent of power and dominion, misled them into it; —or that their own carnal expectations turned wilful interpreters upon them, inclining them to look for nothing but the wealth and worldly grandeur which were to be acquired under their deliverer;—whether these,—or that the system of temporal blessings helped to cherish them in this gross and covetous expectation,—it was one of the great causes for their rejecting him.—"This fellow, we "know not whence he is,"—was the popular cry of one part:—and they who seemed to know whence he was, scornfully turned it against him, by the repeated *quere*,—"Is not this the carpenter, the son "of Mary, the brother of James and Joses, and of

"Juda and Simeon?—and are not his sisters here "with us?"—And they were offended at him: so that, though he was prepared by God to be the glory of his people Israel, yet the circumstances of humility, in which he was manifested, were thought a scandal to them.—Strange!—that he who was born their king,—should be born of no other virgin than Mary,—the meanest of their people;—"for he hath "regarded the low estate of his hand-maiden,"—and of one of the poorest too; for she had not a lamb to offer,—but was purified, as Moses directed in such a case, by the oblation of a turtle-dove:—that the Saviour of their nation, whom they expected to be ushered amidst them with all the ensigns and apparatus of royalty, should be brought forth in a stable, and answerable to distress;—subjected all his life to the lowest conditions of humanity:—that whilst he lived, he should not have a hole to put his head in, nor his corpse in when he died;—but his grave too must be the gift of charity:—these were thwarting considerations to those who waited for the redemption of Israel, and looked for it in no other shape than the accomplishment of those golden dreams of temporal power and sovereignty which had filled their imaginations.—The ideas were not to be reconciled;—and so insuperable an obstacle was the prejudice on one side, to their belief on the other,—that it literally fell out, as Simeon prophetically declared of the Messiah,—that he was set forth for the fall, as well as the rising again, of many in Israel.

This, though it was the cause of their infidelity was however no excuse for it;—for whatever their mistakes were, the miracles which were wrought in

contradiction to them, brought conviction enough to leave them without excuse ;—and besides, it was natural for them to have concluded, had their prepossessions given them leave, that he who fed five thousand with five loaves and two fishes, could not want power to be great ;—and therefore needed not to appear in the condition of poverty and meanness, had it not, on other scores, been more needful to confront the pride and vanity of the world,—and to shew his followers what the temper of christianity was, by the temper of its first institutor ; who, though they were offered, and he could have commanded them, despised the glories of the world ;—took upon him the form of a servant ;—and, though equal with God, yet made himself of no reputation,—that he might settle and be the example of so holy and humble a religion, and thereby convince his disciples forever, that neither his kingdom nor their happiness were to be of this world.—Thus the Jews might have easily argued ;—but when there was nothing but reason to do it with on one side, and strong prejudices, backed with interest, to maintain the dispute, upon the other, we do not find the point is always so easily determined. Although the purity of our Saviour's doctrine, and the mighty works he wrought in its support, were demonstratively stronger arguments for his divinity than the unrespected lowliness of his condition could be against it, —yet, the prejudice continued strong ;—they had been accustomed to temporal promises ;—so bribed to do their duty, they could not endure to think of a religion that would not promise, as much as Moses did, to fill their basket, and set them high above all nations :—a religion whose appearance

was not great and splendid, but looked thin and meagre; and whose principles and promises, like the curses of their law, called for sufferings, and promised persecutions.

If we take this key along with us through the New Testament, it will let us into the spirit and meaning of many of our Saviour's replies in his conferences with his disciples, and others of the Jews; —so particularly in this place, Matthew xi. when John had sent two of his disciples to enquire, whether it was he that should come, or that they were to look for another?—our Saviour, with a particular eye to this prejudice, and the general scandal he knew had risen against his religion upon this worldly account, after a recital to the messengers of the many miracles he had wrought; as that the blind received their sight, the lame walked, the lepers were cleansed, the dead raised; all which characters, with their benevolent ends, fully demonstrated him to be the Messiah that was promised them,—he closes up his answer to them with the words of the text,—"And blessed is he that shall not be offended in me."—Blessed is the man whose upright and honest heart will not be blinded by worldly considerations, or hearken to his lusts and prepossessions in a truth of this moment. The like benediction is recorded in the seventh chapter of St. Luke, and in the sixth of St. John; when Peter broke out in that warm confession of their belief: —"Lord, we believe: we are sure that thou art "Christ, the Son of the living God."—The same benediction is uttered,—though couched in different words:—"Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona;—"for flesh and blood has not revealed it, but my

"Father which is in heaven."—Flesh and blood,—the natural workings of this carnal desire;—the lust and love of the world, have had no hand in this conviction of thine;—but my Father, and the works which I have wrought in his name,—in vindication of this faith,—have established thee in it, against which the gates of hell shall not prevail.—

This universal ruling principle, and almost invincible attachment to the interests and glories of the world, which we see first made so powerful a stand against the belief of Christianity,—has continued to have as ill an effect, at least, upon the practice of it ever since;—and therefore there is no one point of wisdom that is of nearer importance to us, than to purify this gross appetite, and restrain it within bounds, by lowering our high conceit of the things of this life, and our concern for those advantages which misled the Jews. To judge justly of the world, we must stand at a due distance from it; which will discover to us the vanity of its riches and honours in such true dimensions, as will engage us to behave ourselves towards them with moderation.—This is all that is wanting to make us wise and good;—that we may be left to the full influence of religion;—to which Christianity so far conduces, that it is the great blessing, the peculiar advantage we enjoy under its institution, that it affords us not only the most excellent precepts of this kind, but also it shews us those precepts confirmed by most excellent examples.—A heathen philosopher may talk very elegantly about despising the world, and, like Seneca, may prescribe very ingenious rules to teach us an art he never exercised himself:—for all the while he was writing in praise of poverty,

he was enjoying a great estate, and endeavouring to make it greater.—But if ever we hope to reduce those rules to practice, it must be by the help of religion.—If we would find men who by their lives bore witness to their doctrines, we must look for them amongst the acts and monuments of our church,—amongst the first followers of their crucified Master; who spoke with authority, because they spoke experimentally, and took care to make their words good, by despising the world, and voluntarily accounting all things in it loss, that they might win Christ.—O holy and blessed apostles!—blessed were ye indeed,—for ye conferred not with flesh and blood,—for ye were not offended in him through any considerations of this world;—ye conferred not with flesh and blood, neither with its snares and temptations.—Neither the pleasures of life nor the pains of death laid hold upon your faith, to make you fall from him.—Ye had your prejudices of worldly grandeur in common with the rest of your nation;—saw, like them, your expectations blasted;—but ye gave them up, as men governed by reason and truth.—As ye surrendered all your hopes in this world to your faith with fortitude,—so did ye meet the terrors of the world with the same temper.—Neither the frowns and discountenance of the civil powers,—"neither tribulation, "nor distress, nor persecution, nor cold, nor naked-"ness, nor famine, nor the sword, could separate "you from the love of Christ."—Ye took up your crosses cheerfully, and followed him;—followed the same rugged way, trod the wine-press after him;—voluntarily submitting yourselves to poverty, to punishment, to the scorn and the reproaches of the

world, which ye knew were to be the portion of all of you who engaged in preaching a mystery so spoken against by the world ;—so unpalatable to all its passions and pleasures,—and so irreconcileable to the pride of human reason ; so that ye were, as one of you expressed, and all of ye experimentally found, Though ye were made as the filth of the world, and the off-scouring of all things, upon this account, —yet ye went on as zealously as ye set out.—Ye were not offended, nor ashamed of the gospel of Christ ;—wherefore should ye ?—The impostor and hypocrite might have been ashamed ;—the guilty would have found cause for it ;—ye had no cause, —though ye had temptation.—Ye preached but what ye knew ; and your honest and upright hearts gave evidence,—the strongest,—to the truth of it ; —for ye left all,—ye suffered all,—ye gave all that your sincerity had left you to give. Ye gave your lives at last as pledges and confirmations of your faith and warmest affection for your Lord.—Holy and blessed men !—ye gave all,—when, alas ! our cold and frozen affection will part with nothing for his sake, not even with our vices and follies, which are worse than nothing ;—for they are vanity, and misery, and death.

The state of Christianity calls not now for such evidences as the apostles gave of their attachment to it. We have, literally speaking, neither houses, nor lands, nor possessions to forsake ;—we have neither wives nor children, nor brethren nor sisters, to be torn from ;—no rational pleasure, or natural endearments to give up. We have nothing to part with,—but what is not our interest to keep,—our lusts and passions. We have nothing to do for

Christ's,—but what is most for our own ;—that is, —to be temperate, and chaste, and just, and peaceable, and charitable, and kind to one another ;—so that, if man could suppose himself in a capacity even of capitulating with God concerning the terms upon which he would submit to his government,—and to choose the laws he would be bound to observe in testimony of his faith,—it were impossible for him to make any proposals which, upon all accounts, should be more advantageous to his interest than those very conditions to which we are already obliged ; that is, to deny ourselves ungodliness, to live soberly and righteously in this present life, and lay such restraints upon our appetites as are for the honour of human nature,—the improvement of our happiness,—our health,—our peace,—our reputation and safety.—When one considers this representation of the temporal inducements of christianity,—and compares it with the difficulties and diacouragements which they encountered who first made profession of a persecuted and hated religion ;—at the same time that it raises the idea of the fortitude and sanctity of those holy men, of whom the world is not worthy,—it sadly diminishes that of ourselves,—which, though it has all the blessings of this life apparently on its side to support it,—yet can scarce be kept alive ;—and if we may form a judgment from the little stock of religion which is left,—should God ever exact the same trials,—unless we greatly alter for the better, —or there should prove some secret charm in persecution, which we know not of,—it is much to be doubted if the Son of man should make this proof—of this generation,—whether there would be found faith upon the earth.

As this argument may convince us,—so let it shame us into virtue,—that the admirable examples of those holy men may not be left us, or commemorated by us to no end;—but rather that they may answer the pious purpose of their institution,—to conform our lives to theirs;—that with them we may be partakers of a glorious inheritance, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SERMON XXXVII.

PENANCES.

I JOHN V. 3.

And his commandments are not grievous.

No,-- they are not grievous, my dear auditors.—Amongst the many prejudices which at one time or other have been conceived against our holy religion, there is scarce any one which has done more dishonour to christianity, or which has been more opposite to the spirit of the gospel, than this, in express contradiction to the words of the text, " That " the commandments of God *are* grievous."—That the way which leads to life is not only strait, for that our Saviour tells us, and that with much tribulation we shall seek it ;—but that christians are bound to make the worst of it, and tread it barefoot upon thorns and briers,—if ever they expect to arrive happily at their journey's end. And in course, —during this disastrous pilgrimage, it is our duty so to renounce the world, and abstract ourselves from it, as neither to interfere with its interests, nor taste any of the pleasures, or any of the enjoyments of this life.

Nor has this been confined merely to speculation, but has frequently been extended to practice,—as is plain, not only from the lives of many legendary saints and hermits,—whose chief commendation seems to have been, " That they fled unnaturally

"from all commerce with their fellow-creatures, "and then mortified and (piously)--half starved "themselves to death ;"--but likewise from the many austere and fantastick orders which we see in the Romish church, which have all owed their origin and establishment to the same idle and extravagant opinion.

Nor is it to be doubted, but the affectation of something like it in our Methodists, when they descant upon the necessity of alienating themselves from the world, and selling all that they have,--is not to be ascribed to the same mistaken enthusiastick principle, which would cast so black a shade upon religion, as if the kind Author of it had created us on purpose to go mourning, all our lives long, in sackcloth and ashes,--and sent us into the world, as so many saint-errants, in quest of adventurers full of sorrow and affliction.

Strange force of enthusiasm !--and yet not altogether unaccountable. For what opinion was there ever so odd, or action so extravagant, which has not, at one time or other, been produced by ignorance, --conceit,--melancholy !--a mixture of devotion, with an ill concurrence of air and diet, operating together in the same person !--When the minds of men happen to be thus unfortunately prepared, whatever groundless doctrine rises up, and settles itself strongly upon their fancies, has generally the ill-luck to be interpreted as an illumination from the spirit of God ;--and whatever strange action they find in themselves a strong inclination to do,--that impulse is concluded to be a call from heaven ; and consequently,--that they cannot err in executing it.

If this, or some such account, was not to be admitted, how is it possible to be conceived that christianity, which breathed out nothing but peace and comfort to mankind; which professedly took off the severities of the Jewish law, and was given us in the spirit of meekness, to ease our shoulders of a burden which was too heavy for us;—that this religion, so kindly calculated for the ease and tranquillity of man, which enjoins nothing but what is suitable to his nature, should be so misunderstood; —or that it should ever be supposed—that he who is infinitely happy, could envy us our enjoyments; —or that a Being infinitely kind, would grudge a mournful passenger a little rest and refreshment, to support his spirits, through a weary pilgrimage;— or that he should call him to an account hereafter, because, in his way, he had hastily snatched at some fugacious and innocent pleasures, till he was suffered to take up his final repose!—This is no improbable account; and the many invitations we find in scripture to a grateful enjoyment of the blessings and advantages of life, make it evident.—The apostle tells us in the text,—"That God's commandments are not grievous:"—he has pleasure in the prosperity of his people; and wills not that they should turn tyrants and executioners upon their minds or bodies, and inflict pains and penalties on them to no end or purpose:—that he has proposed peace and plenty, joy and victory, as the encouragement and portion of his servants; thereby instructing us,—that our virtue is not necessarily endangered by the fruition of outward things;—but that temporal blessings and advantages, instead of extinguishing, more naturally kindle our love and

gratitude to God, before whom it is no way inconsistent both to worship and rejoice.

If this was not so, why, you'll say, does God seem, to have made such provision for our happiness ?—Why has he given us so many powers and faculties for enjoyment, and adapted so many objects to gratify and entertain them ?—some of which he has created so fair,—with such wonderful beauty, and has formed them so exquisitely for this end,—that they have power, for a time, to charm away the sense of pain,—to cheer up the dejected heart under poverty and sickness, and make it go and remember its miseries no more.—Can all this, you'll say, be reconciled to God's wisdom, which does nothing in vain ?—or can it be accounted for on any other supposition, but that the Author of our being, who has given us all things richly to enjoy, wills us a comfortable existence even *here*, and seems, moreover, so evidently to have ordered things with a view to this, that the ways which lead to our future happiness, when rightly understood, he has made to be "ways of pleasantness, and all her paths peace ?"

From this representation of things, we are led to this demonstrative truth, then,—that God never intended to debar man of pleasures, under certain limitations.

Travellers, on a business of the last and most important concern, may be allowed to please their eyes with the natural and artificial beauties of the country they are passing through, without reproach of forgetting the main errand they were sent upon ;—and, if they are not led out of their road by variety of prospects, edifices, and ruins, would it not be a senseless piece of severity to shut their eyes against

such gratifications ?—" For who has required such " service at their hands ?"

The humouring of certain appetites, where morality is not concerned, seems to be the means by which the Author of nature intended to sweeten this journey of life,—and bear us up under the many shocks and hard jostlings which we are sure to meet with in our way :—and a man might, with as much reason, muffle up himself against sun-shine and fair weather,—and, at other times, expose himself naked to the inclemencies of cold and rain, as debar himself of the innocent delights of his nature, for affected reserve and melancholy.

It is true, on the other hand, our passions are apt to grow upon us by indulgence, and become exorbitant, if they are not kept under exact discipline ; that, by way of caution and prevention, 'twere better, at certain times, to affect some degree of needless reserve, than hazard any ill consequences from the other extreme.

But when almost the whole of religion is made to consist in the pious fooleries of penances and sufferings, as is practised in the church of Rome (did no other evil attend it) yet, since it is putting religion upon a wrong scent, placing it more in these than in inward purity and integrity of heart, one cannot guard too much against this, as well as all other such abuses of religion, as to make it consist in something which it ought not.—How such mockery became a part of religion at first, or upon what motives they were imagined to be services acceptable to God, is hard to give a better account of than what was hinted above ;—namely, that men of melancholy and morose tempers, conceiving the Deity to be

like themselves, a gloomy, discontented, and sorrowful being,—believed he delighted, as they did, in splenetick and mortifying actions, and, therefore, made their religious worship to consist of chimeras as wild and barbarous as their own dreams and vapours!

What ignorance and enthusiasm at first introduced,—now tyranny and imposture continue to support;—so that the political improvement of these delusions to the purposes of wealth and power, is made one of the strongest pillars which upholds the Romish religion;—which, with all its pretences to a more strict mortification and sanctity,—when you examine it minutely, is little else than a mere pecuniary contrivance.—And the truest definition you can give of popery, is,—That it is a system put together and contrived to operate upon mens weaknesses and passions,—and thereby to pick their pockets,—and leave them in a fit condition for its arbitray designs.

And, indeed, that church has not been wanting in gratitude for the good offices of this kind, which the doctrine of penances has done them; for, in consideration of its services,—they have raised it above the level of moral duties,—and have at length complimented it into the number of their sacraments, and made it a necessary point of salvation.

By these, and other tenets no less politick and inquisitional,—popery has found out the art of making men miserable, in spite of their senses and the plenty with which God has blessed them.

So that in many countries where popery reigns,—but especially in that part of Italy where she has raised her throne,—though, by the happiness of its

soil and climate, it is capable of producing as great variety and abundance as any country upon earth,—yet, so successful have its spiritual directors been in the management and retail of these blessings,—that they have found means to allay, if not entirely to defeat, them all, by one pretence or other.—Some bitterness is officiously squeezed into every man's cup for his soul's health, till at length, the whole intention of nature and Providence is destroyed.—It is not surprising that, where such unnatural severities are practised and heightened by other hardships, the most fruitful land should be barren, and wear a face of poverty and desolation; —or that many thousands, as have been observed, should fly from the rigours of such a government, and seek shelter rather amongst rocks and deserts, than lie at the mercy of so many unreasonable taskmasters, under whom they can hope for no other reward for their industry—but rigorous slavery, made still worse by the tortures of unnecessary mortifications.—I say *unnecessary*,—because, where there *is* a virtuous and good end proposed from any sober instances of self-denial and mortification,—God forbid we should call them unnecessary, or that we should dispute against a thing—from the abuse to which it has been put:—and, therefore, what is said in general upon this head, will be understood to reach no farther than where the practice is become a mixture of fraud and tyranny, but will nowise be interpreted to extend to those self-denials which the discipline of our holy church directs at this solemn season; which have been introduced by reason and good sense at first, and have since been applied to serve no purposes but those of religion;

—these, by restraining our appetites for a while, and withdrawing our thoughts from grosser objects, —do, by a mechanical effect, dispose us for cool and sober reflections, incline us to turn our eyes inwards upon ourselves, and consider what we are,—and what we have been doing ;—for what intent we were sent into the world, and what kind of characters we were designed to act in it.

It is necessary that the mind of man, at some certain periods, should be prepared to enter into this account ; and without some such discipline, to check the insolence of unrestrained appetites, and call home the conscience,—the soul of man, capable as it is of brightness and perfection, would sink down to the lowest depths of darkness and brutality.—However true this is, there still appears no obligation to renounce the innocent delights of our beings, or to affect a sullen distate against them :—nor, in truth, can even the supposition of it be well admitted ;—for pleasures arising from the free and natural exercises of the faculties of the mind and body, to talk them down, is like talking against the frame and mechanism of human nature ; and would be no less senseless than the disputing against the burning of fire, or falling downwards of a stone.—Besides this, man is so contrived, that he stands in need of frequent repairs :—both mind and body are apt to sink and grow inactive under long and close attention ;—and, therefore, must be restored by proper recruits.—Some part of our time may doubtless innocently and lawfully be employed in actions merely diverting ;—and, whenever such indulgences become criminal, it is seldom the nature of the

actions themselves, but the excess which makes them so.

But some one may here ask,—By what rule are we to judge of excess in these cases?—If the enjoyment of the same sort of pleasures may be either innocent or guilty, according to the use or abuse of them,—how shall we be certified where the boundaries lie? or be speculative enough to know how far we may go with safety?—I answer, There are very few who are not casuists enough to make a right judgment in this point;—for since one principal reason why God may be supposed to allow pleasure in this world, seems to be for the refreshment and recruit of our souls and bodies, which, like clocks, must be wound up at certain intervals,—every man understands so much of the frame and mechanism of himself, to know how and when to unbend himself with such relaxations as are necessary to regain his natural vigour and cheerfulness; without which it is impossible he should either be in a disposition or capacity to discharge the several duties of his life.—Here then the partition becomes visible.

Whenever we pay this tribute to our appetites any further than is sufficient for the purposes for which they were first granted,—the action proportionably loses some share of its innocence.—The surplusage of what is unnecessarily spent on such occasions, is so much of the little portion of our time negligently squandered, which, in prudence, we should apply better; because it was allotted us for more important uses; and a different account will be required of it at our hands hereafter.

For this reason, does it not evidently follow,—that many actions and pursuits, which are irre-

proachable in their own natures, may be rendered blameable and vitious, from this single consideration, "That they have made us wasteful of the moments of this short and uncertain fragment of life, which should be almost one of our last prodigalities, since, of them all, the least retrievable."—Yet how often is diversion, instead of amusement and relaxation, made the art and business of life itself!—Look round,—what policy and contrivance is every day put in practice, for pre-engaging every day in the week, and parcelling out every hour of the day for one idleness or another,—for doing nothing,—or something worse than nothing;—and that with so much ingenuity, as scarce to leave a minute upon their hands to reproach them!—Though we all complain of the shortness of life, yet how many people seem quite overstocked with the days and hours of it, and are continually sending out into the highways and streets of the city for guests to come and take it off their hands!—If some of the more distressful objects of this kind were to sit down and write a bill of their time, though partial as that of the unjust steward,—when they found, in reality, that the whole sum of it, for many years, amounted to little more than this,—That they had rose up to eat,—to drink,—to play,—and had lain down again, merely because they were fit for nothing else;—when they looked back and beheld this fair space, capable of such heavenly improvements,—all scrawled over and defaced with a succession of so many unmeaning cyphers,—good God,—how would they be ashamed and confounded at the account!

With what reflections will they be able to support themselves in the decline of a life so miserably cast

away,—should it happen, as it sometimes does,—that they have stood idle even unto the eleventh hour!—We have not always power, and are not always in a temper, to impose upon ourselves.—When the edge of appetite is worn down, and the spirits of youthful days are cooled, which hurried us on in a circle of pleasure and impertinence,—then reason and reflection will have the weight which they deserve;—afflictions, or the bed of sickness, will supply the place of conscience;—and, if they should fail,—old age will overtake us at last,—and shew us the past pursuits of life,—and force us to look upon them in their true point of view.—If there is any thing more to cast a cloud upon so melancholy a prospect as this shews us,—it is surely the difficulty and hazard of having all the work of the day to perform in the last hour;—of making an atonement to God, when we have no sacrifice to offer him but the dregs and infirmities of those days, when we could have no pleasure in them.

How far God may be pleased to accept such late and imperfect services, is beyond the intention of this discourse.—Whatever stress some may lay upon it,—a death-bed repentance is but a weak and slender plank to trust our all upon.—Such as it is;—to that,—and God's infinite mercies, we commit them, who will not employ that time and opportunity he has given to provide a better security.

That we may all make a right use of the time allotted us,—God grant, through the merits of his Son Jesus Christ. Amen.

SERMON XXXVIII.

ON ENTHUSIASM.

ST. JOHN XV. 5.

For without me, ye can do nothing.

Our Saviour, in the former part of the verse, having told his disciples,—That he was the vine, and that they were only branches ;—intimating in what a degree their good fruits, as well as the success of all their endeavours, were to depend upon his communications with them,—he closes the illustration with the inference from it, in the words of the text, —" For without me, ye can do nothing."—In the 11th chapter to the Romans, where the manner is explained in which a Christian stands by faith,—there is a like illustration made use of, and probably with an eye to this,—where St. Paul instructs us,—that a good man stands as the branch of a wild olive does when it is grafted into a good olive-tree ;—and that is,—it flourishes not through its own virtue, but in virtue of the root,—and such a root as is naturally not its own.

It is very remarkable in that passage,—that the apostle calls a bad man a wild olive-tree ;—not barely a branch (as in the other case) but a tree which, having a root of its own, supports itself, and stands in its own strength, and brings forth its own fruit.—And so does every bad man, in respect of the wild

and sour fruit of a vitious and corrupt heart.—According to the resemblance,—if the apostle intended it,—he is a tree,—has a root of his own,—and fruitfulness, such as it is, with a power to bring it forth without help. But in respect of religion, and the moral improvements of virtue and goodness,—the apostle calls us, and reason tells us, we are no more than a branch; and all our fruitfulness, and all our support,—depend so much upon the influence and communications of God,—that without him we can do nothing,—as our Saviour declares in the text.—There is scarce any point in our religion wherein men have run into such violent extremes as in the senses given to this, and such like declarations in scripture,—of our sufficiency being of God;—some understanding them so, as to leave no meaning at all in them;—others,—too much:—the one interpreting the gifts and influences of the Spirit, so as to destroy the truth of all such promises and declarations in the gospel;—the other carrying their notions of them so high, as to destroy the reason of the gospel itself,—and render the christian religion, which consists of sober and consistent doctrines,—the most intoxicated,—the most wild and unintelligible institution that ever was in the world.

This being premised, I know not how I can more seasonably engage your attention this day, than by a short examination of each of these errors;—in doing which, as I shall take some pains to reduce both the extremes of them to reason,—it will necessarily lead me, at the same time, to mark the safe and true doctrine of our church, concerning the promised influences and operations of the spirit of God upon our hearts;—which, however depreciated through the

first mistake,—or boasted of beyond measure through the second,—must nevertheless be so limited and understood,—as, on one hand, to make the gospel of Christ consistent with itself; and, on the other, to make it consistent with reason and common sense.

If we consider the many express declarations, wherein our Saviour tells his followers, before his crucifixion,—That God would send his Spirit the Comforter amongst them, to supply his place in their hearts;—and, as in the text,—That without him they could "do nothing:"—if we conceive them as spoken to his disciples, with an immediate view to the emergencies they were under, from their *natural* incapacities of finishing the great work he had left them, and building upon that large foundation he had laid,—without some extraordinary help and guidance to carry them through,—no one can dispute that evidence and confirmation which was afterwards given of its truth;—as our Lord's disciples were illiterate men, consequently unskilled in the arts and acquired ways of persuasion.—Unless this want had been supplied,—the first obstacle to their labours must have discouraged and put an end to them forever.—As they had no language but their own, without the gift of tongues, they could not have preached the gospel, except in Judea;—and as they had no authority of their own,—without the supernatural one of signs and wonders,—they could not vouch for the truth of it beyond the limits where it was first transacted.—In this work, doubtless, all their sufficiency and power of acting was immediately from God;—his Holy Spirit, as he had promised them, so it gave them a mouth and wisdom which

all their adversaries were not able to gainsay or resist;—so that without him,—without these extraordinary gifts, in the most literal sense of the words, they could do nothing.—But besides this application of the text to those particular persons and times, when God's spirit was poured down in that signal manner, held sacred to this day,—there is something in them to be extended further, which christians of all ages,—and, I hope, of all denominations, have still a claim and trust in,—and that is, the ordinary assistance and influences of the spirit of God in our hearts, for moral and virtuous improvements;—these, both in their natures as well as intentions, being altogether different from the others abovementioned, conferred upon the disciples of our Lord.—The one were miraculous gifts,—in which the endowed person contributed nothing which advanced human nature above itself, and raised all its projectile springs above their fountains; enabling them to speak and act such things, and in such manner, as was impossible for men not inspired and preternaturally upheld.—In the other case, the helps spoken of were the influence of God's spirit, which upheld us from falling below the dignity of our nature:—that divine assistance which graciously kept us from falling, and enabled us to perform the holy professions of our religion.—Though these are equally called spiritual gifts, they are not, as in the first case, the entire works of the Spirit,—but the calm co-operations of it with our own endeavours; and are ordinarily what every sincere and well-disposed christian has reason to pray for and expect from the same fountain of strength,—who has promised to give his Holy Spirit to them that asked it.

From this point, which is the true doctrine of our church, the two parties begin to divide both from it and each other ;—each of them equally misapplying these passages of scripture, and wresting them to extremes equally pernicious.

To begin with the first ;—Of whom should you inquire the explanation and meaning of this or of other texts,—wherein the assistance of God's grace and Holy Spirit is implied as necessary to sanctify our nature, and enable us to serve and please God ? —They will answer,—That no doubt all our parts and abilities are the gifts of God ;—who is the original author of our nature,—and, of consequence, of all that belongs thereto.—That as by " him we live, " and move, and have our being,"—we must in course depend upon him for all our actions whatsoever,—since we must depend upon him even for our life, and for every moment of its continuance.—That from this view of our state and natural dependence, it is certain, they will say,—We can do nothing without his help.—But then they will add,—That it concerns us no farther as *christians* than as we are *men ;* —the sanctity of our lives, the religious habits and improvements of our hearts, in no other sense depending upon God than the most indifferent of our actions, or the natural exercise of any of the other powers he has given us.—Agreeably with this, that the spiritual gifts spoken of in scripture, are to be understood by way of accommodation, to signify the natural or acquired gifts of a man's mind,—such as memory, fancy, wit, and eloquence ; which, in a strict and philosophical sense, may be called spiritual ;—because they transcend the mechanical pow-

ers of matter,—and proceed more or less from the rational soul, which is a spiritual substance.

Whether these ought, in propriety, to be called spiritual gifts, I shall not contend, as it seems a mere dispute about words ;—but it is enough that the interpretation cuts the knot, instead of untying it ; and, besides, explains away all kind of meaning in the above promises :—and the error of them seems to arise, in the first place, from not distinguishing that these spiritual gifts,—if they must be called so ;—such as memory, fancy, wit,—and other endowments of the mind, which are known by the name of natural parts, belong merely to us as men ; and whether the different degrees, by which we excel each other in them, arise from a natural difference of our souls,—or a happier disposition of the organical parts of us.—They are such, however, as God originally bestows upon us ; and with which, in a great measure, we are sent into the world. But the moral gifts of the Holy Ghost, which are more commonly called the fruits of the Spirit, cannot be confined within this description.—We come not into the world equipt with virtues as we do with talents ; —if we did, we should come into the world with that which robbed virtue of its best title, both to present commendation and future reward.—The gift of continency depends not, as these affirm, upon a mere coldness of the constitution,—or patience and humility from an insensibility of it ;—but they are virtues insensibly wrought in us by the endeavours of our own wills and concurrent influences of a gracious agent !—and the religious improvements arising from thence, are so far from being the effects of nature, and a fit disposition of the several parts and

organical powers given us, that the contrary is true ; —namely, that the stream of our affections and appetites but too naturally carries us the other way : —for this, let any man lay his hand upon his heart and reflect what has passed within him in the several conflicts of meekness,—temperance,—chastity,— and other self-denials,—and he will need no better argument for his conviction.

This hint leads to the true answer to the above misrepresentation of the text,—That we depend upon God in no other sense for our virtues, than we necessarily do for every thing else ; and that the fruits of the spirit are merely the determinations and efforts of our own reason,—and as much our own accomplishments as any other improvements are the effect of our own diligence and industry.

This account, by the way, is opposite to the apostle's, who tells us,—" It is God that worketh in us " both to will and to do, of his good pleasure."—It is true, though we are born ignorant, we can make ourselves skilful ;—we can acquire arts and sciences by our own application and study.—But the case is not the same in respect of goodness.—We can acquire arts and sciences, because we lie under no natural indisposition or backwardness to that acquirement : —for nature, though it be corrupt, yet still it is curious and busy after knowledge.—But it does not appear that to goodness and sanctity of manners we have the same natural propensity.—Lusts within, and temptations without, set up so strong a confederacy against it, as we are never able to surmount by our own strength.—However firmly we may think we stand, the best of us are but upheld, and graciously kept upright ; and whenever this divine as-

sistance is withdrawn, or suspended,—all history, especially the sacred, is full of melancholy instances of what man is when God leaves him to himself, —that he is even a thing of nought.

Whether it was from a conscious experience of this truth in themselves,—or some traditions handed from the scripture-account of it ;—or that it was, in some measure, deducible from the principles of reason ;—in the writings of some of the wisest of the heathen philosophers, we find the strongest traces of the persuasion of God's assisting men to virtue and probity of manners.—One of the greatest masters of reasoning amongst the antients, acknowledges, that nothing great and exalted can be achieved, *sine divino afflatu* ;—and Seneca, to the same purpose, *Nulla mens bona sine Deo* ;—that no soul can be good without divine assistance.—Now whatever comments may be put upon such passages in their writings,—it is certain, those in scripture can receive no other, to be consistent with themselves, than what has been given :—and though, in vindication of human liberty, it is as certain on the other hand,—that education, precepts, examples, pious inclinations, and practical diligence, are great and meritorious advances towards a religious state,— yet the state itself is got and finished by God's grace ; and the concurrence of his spirit upon tempers thus happily pre-disposed, and honestly making use of such fit means :—and unless thus much is understood from them,—the several expressions in scripture, where the offices of the Holy Ghost, conducive to this end, are enumerated— (such as cleansing, guiding, renewing, comforting, strengthening, and establishing us) are a set of unintelligible words, which may

amuse, but can convey little light to the understanding.

This is all I have time left to say at present upon the first error of those, who, by too loose an interpretation of the gifts and fruits of the spirit, explain away the whole sense and meaning of them, and thereby render not only the promises, but the comforts of them too of none effect :—concerning which error, I have only to add this, by way of extenuation of it,—That I believe the great and unedifying rout made about sanctification and regeneration in the middle of the last century,—and the enthusiastick extravagances into which the communications of the spirit have been carried by so many deluded or deluding people in this, are two of the great causes which have driven many a sober man into the opposite extreme, against which I have argued.—Now, if the dread of savouring too much of religion in their interpretations, has done this ill service,—let us inquire, on the other hand, Whether the affectation of too *much* religion, in the other extreme, has not not misled others full as far from truth, and farther from the reason and sobriety of the gospel, than the first ?

I have already proved, by scripture-arguments, that the influence of the Holy Spirit of God is necessary to render the imperfect sacrifice of our obedience pleasing to our Maker.—He hath promised to " perfect his strength in our weakness."—With this assurance we ought to be satisfied ;—especially since our Saviour has thought proper to mortify all scrupulous inquiries into operations of this kind, by comparing them to the wind, " which bloweth where " it listeth ; and thou hearest the sound thereof, but

" canst not tell whence it cometh, or whither it " goeth ;—so is every one that is born of the spirit." —Let humble gratitude acknowledge the effect, unprompted by an idle curiosity to explain the cause.

We are told, without this assistance, we can do nothing ;—we are told, from the same authority, we can do all, through Christ that strengthens us.—We are commanded to " work out our own salvation " with fear and trembling." The reason immediately follows : " For it is God that worketh in you, both " to will and to do, of his own good pleasure."— From these, and many other repeated passages, it is evident that the assistances of grace were not intended to destroy, but to co-operate with the endeavours of man,—and are derived from God in the same manner as all natural powers :—indeed, without this interpretation, How could the Almighty address himself to man as a rational being !—How could his actions be his own !—How could he be considered as a blameable or rewardable creature !

From this account of the consistent opinions of a sober-minded christian, let us take a view of the mistaken enthusiast :—See him ostentatiously clothed with the outward garb of sanctity, to attract the eyes of the vulgar !—See a cheerful demeanour, the natural result of an easy and self-applauding heart, studiously avoided as criminal.—See his countenance overspread with a melancholy gloom and despondence, as if religion, which is evidently calculated to make us happy in this life as well as the next, was the parent of sullenness and discontent ! —Hear him pouring forth his pharisaical ejaculations on his journey, or in the streets !—Hear him boast-

ing of extraordinary communications with the God of all knowledge, and, at the same time, offending against the common rules of his own native language, and the plainer dictates of common sense !—Hear him arrogantly thanking his God, that he is not as other men are ! and, with more than papal uncharitableness, very liberally allotting the portion of the damned to every christian whom he, partial judge, deems less perfect than himself !—to every christian who is walking on in the paths of duty with sober vigilance, aspiring to perfection by progressive attainments, and seriously endeavouring, through a rational faith in his Redeemer, to make his calling and election sure !

There have been no sects in the christian world, however absurd, which have not endeavoured to support their opinions by arguments drawn from scripture, misinterpreted or misapplied.

We had a melancholy instance of this in our country in the last century,—when the church of Christ, as well as the government, during that period of national confusion, was torn asunder into various sects and factions ;—when some men pretended to have scripture-precepts, parables, or prophecies, to plead in favour of the most impious absurdities that falsehood could advance. The same spirit which prevailed amongst the fanaticks, seems to have gone forth amongst these modern enthusiasts.—Faith, the distinguishing characteristick of a christian, is defined by them not as a rational assent of the understanding, to truths which are established by indisputable authority, but as a violent persuasion of mind, that they are instantaneously become the children of God,—that the whole score of their sins

is for ever blotted out, without the payment of one tear of repentance.—Pleasing doctrine this to the fears and passions of mankind!—promising fair to gain proselytes of the vitious and impenitent!

Pardons and indulgences are the great support of papal power;—but these modern empiricks in religion have improved upon the scheme, pretending to have discovered an infallible nostrum for all incurables;—such as will preserve them forever!—and, notwithstanding we have instances of notorious offenders amongst the warmest advocates for sinless perfection,—the charm continues powerful.—Did these visionary notions of an heated imagination tend only to amuse the fancy, they might be treated with contempt;—but when they depreciate all moral attainments;—when the suggestions of a frantick brain are blasphemously ascribed to the holy spirit of God;—when faith and divine love are placed in opposition to practical virtues, they then become the objects of aversion.—In one sense, indeed, many of these deluded people demand our tenderest compassion,—whose disorder is in the head rather than the heart; and who call for the aid of a physician who can cure the distempered state of the body, rather than one who may sooth the anxieties of the mind.

Indeed, in many cases, they seem so much above the skill of either,—that unless God in his mercy rebuke this spirit of enthusiasm which is gone out amongst us, no one can pretend to say how far it may go, or what mischiefs it may do in these kingdoms.—Already it has taught us as much blasphemous language;—and, if it goes on (by the samples given us in their journals) will fill us with as many legenda-

ry accounts of visions and revelations, as we have formerly had from the church of Rome :—and, for any security we have against it ,—when time shall serve, it may as effectually convert the professors of it, even into popery itself,—consistent with their own principles ;—for they have nothing more to do, than to say, that the spirit which inspired them, has signified that the Pope is inspired as well as they ; —and consequently, is infallible.—After which, I cannot see how they can possibly refrain going to mass, consistent with their own principles.

Thus much for these two opposite errors ;—the examination of which has taken up so much time, —that I have little left to add, but to beg of God, by the assistance of his Holy Spirit, to preserve us equally from both extremes, and enable us to form, such right and worthy apprehensions of our holy religion,—that it may never suffer, through the coolness of our conceptions of it, on one hand,— or the immoderate heat of them on the other ;—but that we may at all times see it as it is, and as it was designed by its blessed Founder, as the most rational, sober, and consistent institution that could have been given to the sons of men.——Now to God, &c.

SERMON XXXIX.

ETERNAL ADVANTAGES OF RELIGION.

ECCLESIASTES XII. 13.

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter,—Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man.

The wise man, in the beginning of this book, had proposed it is a grand query to be discussed,—"To "find out what was good for the sons of men, which "they should do under the heavens, all the days of "their lives:"—that is, What was the fittest employment, and the chief and proper business which they should apply themselves to in this world?—And here, in the text, after a fair discussion of the question, he asserts it to be the business of religion,—the fearing God, and keeping his commandments.—This was the conclusion of the whole matter, and the natural result of all his debates and inquiries.—And I am persuaded, the more observations we make upon the short life of man,—the more we experience,—and the longer trials we have of the world,—and the several pretensions it offers to our happiness,—the more we shall be engaged to think, like him,—that we can never find what we look for in any other thing which we do under the heavens, except in that of duty and obedience to God.—In the course of the wise man's examination of this point,—we find a great many beautiful reflections upon human affairs, all tending to illustrate the con-

clusion he draws : and as they are such as are apt to offer themselves to the thoughts of every serious and considerate man,—I cannot do better than renew the impressions,—by retouching the principal arguments of his discourse,—before I proceed to the general use and application of the whole.

In the former part of his book he had taken into his consideration those several states of life to which men usually apply themselves for happiness ;—first, learning,—wisdom ;—next,—mirth,—jollity, and pleasure ;—then power and greatness,—riches and possessions :—all of which are so far from answering the end for which they were at first pursued,—that, by a great variety of arguments,—he proves them severally to be so many " sore travails which " God had given to the sons of men to be exercised " therewith ;"—and, instead of being any, or all of them, our proper end and employment, or sufficient to our happiness,—he makes it plain, by a series of observations upon the life of man,—that they are ever likely to end with others where they had done with him,—that is, in vanity and vexation of spirit.

Then he takes notice of the several accidents of life, which perpetually rob us of what little sweets the fruition of these objects might seem to promise us,—both with regard to our endeavours and our persons in this world.

1st, With regard to our endeavours,—he shows that the most likely ways and means are not always effectual for attaining of their end :—that, in general,—the utmost that human councils and prudence can provide for, is to take care, when they contend in a race, that they be swifter than those who run against them ;—or when they are to fight a battle,

that they be stronger than those whom they are to encounter :—and yet, afterwards, in the ninth chapter, he observes, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong ;—neither yet bread to the wise,—nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor favour to men of skill ;—but time and chance happen to them all.—That there are secret workings in human affairs, which over-rule all human contrivance, and counterplot the wisest of our councils, in so strange and unexpected a manner, as to cast a damp upon our best schemes and warmest endeavours.

And then, for those accidents to which our persons are as liable as our labours,—he observes these three things ;—first, The natural infirmities of our bodies,—which alternately lay us open to the sad changes of pain and sickness ; which, in the fifth chapter, he styles wrath and sorrow ; under which, when a man lies languishing, none of his worldly enjoyments will signify much.—Like one that singeth songs with a heavy heart, neither mirth,—nor power,—nor riches, shall afford him ease ;—nor will all their force be able so to stay the stroke of nature,—" but that he shall be cut off in the midst " of his days, and then all his thoughts perish."—Or else,—what is no uncommon spectacle, in the midst of all his luxury, he may waste away the greatest part of his life, with much weariness and anguish ; and, with the long torture of an unrelenting disease, he may wish himself to go down into the grave, and to be set at liberty from all his possessions and all his misery, at the same time.

2dly, If it be supposed,—that by the strength of spirits, and the natural cheerfulness of a man's tem-

per, he should escape these, "and live many years "and rejoice in them all,"—which is not the lot of many,—yet, "he must remember the days of dark- "ness ;"—that is,—they who devote themselves to a perpetual round of mirth and pleasure, cannot so manage matters as to avoid the thoughts of their future state, and the anxiety about what shall become of them hereafter, when they are to depart out of this world ;—that they cannot so crowd their heads, and fill up their time with other matters,—but that the remembrance of this will sometimes be uppermost,—and thrust itself upon their minds whenever they are retired and serious.—And as this will naturally present to them a dark prospect of their future happiness, it must, at the same time, prove no small damp and allay to what they would enjoy at present.

But, in the third place, suppose a man should be able to avoid sickness,—and to put the trouble of these thoughts likewise far from him,—yet there is something else which he cannot possibly decline ;—old age will unavoidably steal upon him, with all the infirmities of it,—when (as he expresses it) "the "grinders shall be few, and appetite ceases ; when "those who look out of the windows shall be dark- "ened, and the keepers of the house shall trem- "ble ;"—when a man shall become a burden to himself, and to his friends ;—when, perhaps, those of his nearest relations, whom he hath most obliged by kindness, shall think it time for him to depart, to creep off the stage, and make room for the succeeding generations.

And then, after a little funeral pomp of *mourners going about the streets*,—a man shall be buried out

of the way, and in a year or two be as much forgotten as if he had never existed. For there is no remembrance (says he) of the wise more than the fool; —seeing that which now is, in the days to come, shall be forgotten; every day producing something which seems new and strange, to take up mens talk and wonder, and to drown the memory of former persons and actions.—

And I appeal to any rational man, whether these are not some of the most material reflections about human affairs,—which occur to every one who gives himself the least leisure to think about them?—Now, from all these premises put together, Solomon infers this short conclusion in the text,—That to "fear God, and keep his commandments, is the "whole duty of man;"—that, to be serious in the matter of religion, and careful about our future state, is that which, after all our other experiments, will be found to be our chief happiness,—our greatest interest,—our greatest wisdom,—and that which most of all deserves our care and application.—This must ever be the last result, and the upshot of every wise man's observations upon all these transitory things, and upon the vanity of their several pretences to our well-being;—and we may depend upon it as an everlasting truth,—that we can never find what we seek for in any other course, or any other object, but this one;—and the more we know and think, and the more experience we have of the world, and of ourselves, the more we are convinced of this truth, and led back by it to rest our souls upon that God from whence we came.—Every consideration upon the life of man tends to engage us to this point,—to be in earnest in the concernment

of religion ; to love and fear God ;—to provide for our true interest,—and do ourselves the most effectual service,—by devoting ourselves to him,—and always thinking of him,—as he is the true and final happiness of a reasonable and immortal spirit.

And indeed one would think it next to impossible,—did not the commonness of the thing take off from the wonder,—that a man who thinks at all,—should let his whole life be a contradiction to such obvious reflections.

The vanity and emptiness of worldly goods and enjoyments,—the shortness and uncertainty of life,—the unalterable event hanging over our heads,—"That in a few days, we must all of us go to that "place from whence we shall not return ;" the certainty of this,—the uncertainty of the time when,—the immortality of the soul,—the doubtful and momentous issues of eternity,—the terrors of damnation, and the glorious things which are spoken of the city of God, are meditations so obvious, and so naturally check and block up a man's way ; are so very interesting, and, above all, so unavoidable, that it is astonishing how it was possible, at any time, for mortal man to have his head full of any thing else !—And yet, was the same person to take a view of the state of the world,—how slight an observation would convince him, that the wonder lay, in fact, on the other side ;—and that, as wisely as we all discourse, and philosophize *de contemptu mundi & fuga sæculi*,—yet, for one who really acts in the world,—consistent with his own reflections upon it,—that there are multitudes who seem to take aim at nothing higher ;—and, as empty a thing as it is,—are so dazzled with it, as to think it meet to build

tabernacles of rest upon it,—and say, " It is good to " be here."—Whether, as an able inquirer into this paradox-guesses ;—whether it is, that men do not heartily believe such a thing as a future state of happiness and misery ;—or if they do,—that they do not actually and seriously consider it,—but suffer it to lie dormant and inactive within them, and so are as little affected with it as if, in truth, they believed it not ;—or whether they look upon through that end of the perspective which represents it as afar off, and so are more forcibly drawn by the nearer, though the lesser, loadstone ?—whether these, or whatever other cause may be assigned for it, the observation is incontestable, That the bulk of mankind, in passing through this vale of misery,—use it not as a well to refresh and allay,—but fully to quench and satisfy their thirst ;—minding or (as the apostle says) relishing earthly things,—making them the end and sum total of their desires and wishes ;—and, in one word,—loving this world—just as they are commanded to love God ;—that is, —" with all their heart, with all their soul,—with " all their mind and strength." But this is not the strangest part of this paradox. A man shall not only lean and rest upon the world with his whole stress, but, in many instances, shall live notoriously bad and vitious ; when he is reproved, he shall seem convinced ; when he is observed, he shall be ashamed ; when he pursues his sin, he will do it in the dark ; and when he has done it, shall even be dissatisfied with himself: yet still, this shall produce no alteration in his conduct. Tell him he shall one day die ; or bring the event still nearer, and shew, that, according to the course of nature, he cannot

possibly live many years, he will sigh, perhaps, and tell you he is convinced of that as much as reason and experience can make him. Proceed, and urge to him, that after death comes judgment, and that he will certainly there be dealt with by a just God according to his actions,—he will thank God he is no deist, and tell you, with the same grave face, he is thoroughly convinced of that too ; and as he believes, no doubt he trembles too : and yet after all, with all this conviction upon his mind, you will see him still persevere in the same course, and commit his sin with as certain an event and resolution, as if he knew no argument against it. These notices of things, however terrible and true, pass through his understanding as an eagle through the air, that leaves no path behind.

So that, upon the whole, instead of abounding with occasions to set us seriously on thinking, the world might dispense with many more calls of this kind ; and were they seven times as many as they are, considering what insufficient use we make of those we have, all, I fear, would be little enough to bring these things to our remembrance as often, and engage us to lay them to our hearts with that affectionate concern which the weight and interest of them requires at our hands. Sooner or later, the most inconsiderate of us all shall find, with Solomon, that to do this effectually, " is the whole duty " of man."

And I cannot conclude this discourse upon his words better, than with a short and earnest exhortation, that the solemnity of this season, and the meditations to which it is devoted, may lead you up to the true knowledge and practice of the same point,

of fearing God and keeping his commandments, and convince you, as it did him, of the indispensable necessity of making that the business of a man's life, which is the chief end of his being, the eternal happiness and salvation of his soul :—

Which may God grant, for the sake of Jesus Christ. Amen.

SERMON XL.

ASA : A THANKSGIVING SERMON.

II CHRONICLES XV. 14.

And they sware unto the Lord with a loud voice, and with shouting, and with trumpets, and with cornets.—And all the men of Judah rejoiced at the oath.

It will be necessary to give a particular account of what was the occasion, as well as the nature of the oath which the men of Judah sware unto the Lord ;—which will explain not only the reasons why it became a matter of so much joy to them, but likewise admit of an application suitable to the purposes of this solemn assembly.

Abijah, and Asa his son, were successive kings of Judah.—The first came to the crown at the close of a long, and, in the end, a very unsuccessful war, which had gradually wasted the strength and riches of his kingdom.

He was a prince endowed with the talents which the emergencies of his country required, and seemed born to make Judah a victorious, as well as a happy people.—The conduct and great success of his arms against Jeroboam, had well established the first ;—but his kingdom, which had been so many years the seat of a war, had been so wasted and bewildered, that his reign, good as it was, was too short to accomplish the latter.—He died, and left the work unfinished for his son.—Asa succeeded, in

the room of Abijah his father, with the truest notions of religion and government that could be derived either from reason or experience.—His reason told him, that God should be worshipped in simplicity and singleness of heart;—therefore he took away the altars of the strange gods, and broke down their images.—His experience told him, that the most successful wars, instead of invigorating, more generally drained away the vitals of government,—and, at the best, ended but in a brighter and more ostentatious kind of poverty and desolation:—therefore he laid aside his sword, and studied the arts of ruling Judah with peace.—Conscience would not suffer Asa to sacrifice his subjects to private views of ambition; and wisdom forbade he should suffer them to offer up themselves to the pretence of publick ones,—since enlargement of empire, by the destruction of its people (the natural and only valuable source of strength and riches) was a dishonest and miserable exchange:—and however well the glory of a conquest might appear in the eyes of a common beholder, yet, when bought at that costly rate, a father to his country would behold the triumphs which attended it, and weep as it passed by him.—Amidst all the glare and jollity of the day, the parent's eyes would fix attentively upon his child;—he would discern him drooping under the weight of his attire, without strength or vigour, his former beauty and comeliness gone off:—he would behold the coat of many colours stained with blood, and cry,—Alas! they have decked thee with a parent's pride, but not with a parent's care and foresight.

With such affectionate sentiments of government, and just principles of religion, Asa began his reign.—A reign marked out with new eras, and a succession of happier occurrences than what had distinguished former days.

The just and gentle spirit of the prince insensibly stole into the breasts of the people.—The men of Judah turned their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruninghooks.—By industry and virtuous labour they acquired what by spoil and rapine they might have sought after long in vain.—The traces of their late troubles soon began to wear out.—The cities, which had become ruinous and desolate (the prey of famine and the sword) were now rebuilt, fortified, and made populous.—Peace, security, wealth, and prosperity, seemed to compose the whole history of Asa's reign.—O Judah! what could then have been done more than what was done to make thy people happy?

What one blessing was withheld, that thou shouldest ever withhold thy thankfulness?

That thou didst not continually turn thy eyes towards heaven with an habitual sense of God's mercies, and devoutly praise him for setting Asa over you?

Were not the publick blessings, and the private enjoyments, which every man of Judah derived from them, such as to make the continuance of them desirable;—and what other way was there to effect it, than to swear unto the Lord, with all your hearts and souls, to perform the covenant made with your fathers?—to secure that favour and interest with the almighty Being, without which the wisdom of this world is foolishness, and the best connected sys-

tems of human policy are speculative and airy projects, without foundation or substance.—The history of their own exploits and establishment, since they had become a nation, was a strong confirmation of this doctrine.

But too free and uninterrupted a possession of God Almighty's blessings, sometimes (though it seems strange to suppose it) even tempts men to forget him, either from a certain depravity and ingratitude of nature, not to be wrought upon by goodness,—or that they are made by it too passionately fond of the present hour, and too thoughtless of its great Author, whose kind providence brought it about.—This seemed to have been the case with the men of Judah :—for notwithstanding all that God had done for them, in placing Abijah and Asa his son over them, and inspiring them with hearts and talents proper to retrieve the errors of the foregoing reign, and bring back peace and plenty to the dwellings of Judah ;—yet there appears no record of any solemn and religious acknowledgment to God for such signal favours. The people sat down in a thankless security, " each man under his vine, to eat " and drink, and rose up to play ;"—more solicitous to enjoy their blessings, than to deserve them.

But this scene of tranquillity was not to subsist without some change ;—and it seemed as if providence at length had suffered the stream to be interrupted, to make them consider whence it flowed, and how necessary it had been all along to their support. The Ethiopians, ever since the beginning of Abijah's reign, until the tenth year of Asa's, had been at peace, or, at least, whatever secret enmity they bore, had made no open attacks upon the king-

dom of Judah.—And indeed the bad measures which Rehoboam had taken, in the latter part of the reign which immediately preceded theirs, seemed to have saved the Ethiopians the trouble.—For Rehoboam, though in the former part of his reign he dealt wisely; yet, when he had established his kingdom, and strengthened himself,—he forsook the laws of the Lord;—he forsook the counsel which the old men gave him, and took counsel with the young men, which were brought up with him, and stood before him.—Such ill-advised measures, in all probability, had given the enemies of Judah such decisive advantages over her, that they had sat down contented, and for many years enjoyed the fruits of their acquisitions.—But the friendship of princes is seldom made up of better materials than those which are every day to be seen in private life,—in which sincerity and affection are not at all considered as ingredients.—Change of time and circumstances produce a change of councils and behaviour.—Judah, in length of time, had become a fresh temptation, and was worth fighting for.—Her riches and plenty might first make her enemies covet; and then the remembrance of how cheap and easy a prey she had formerly been, might make them not doubt of obtaining.

By these apparent motives (or whether God, who sometimes over-rules the heart of man, was pleased to turn them by secret ones, to the purposes of his wisdom) the ambition of the Ethiopians revived. With an host of men, numerous as the sand upon the sea-shore in multitude,—they had left their country, and were coming forwards to invade them.

—What can Judah propose to do in so terrifying a crisis ?—where can she betake herself for refuge ? —On one hand, her religion and laws are too precious to be given up, or trusted to the hands of a stranger ;—and, on the other hand, how can so small a kingdom, just recovering strength, surrounded by an army of a thousand thousand men, besides chariots and horses, be able to withstand so powerful a shock ?—But here it appeared, that those who, in their prosperity, can forget God, do yet remember him in the day of danger and distress ;—and can begin with comfort to depend upon his providence, when with comfort they can depend upon nothing else :—for when Zerah, the Ethiopian, was come unto the valley of Zephatha at Maretha, Asa, and all the men of Judah and Benjamin, went out against him ;—and as they went, they cried mightily unto God.—And Asa prayed for his people, and he said, —" O Lord ! it is nothing with thee to help, wheth- " er with many, or with them that have no power : " —help us, O Lord our God ! for we rest in thee, " and in thy name we go against this multitude.— " O Lord, thou art our God, let not man prevail " against thee."—Success almost seemed a debt due to the piety of the prince, and the contrition of his people.—So God smote the Ethiopians, and they could not recover themselves ;—for they were scattered, and utterly destroyed,—before the Lord, and before his host.—And as they returned to Jerusalem from pursuing,—behold the spirit of God came upon Asariah, the son of Oded.—And he went out to meet Asa, and he said unto him,—" Hear ye me, " Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin ; the Lord is " with you, whilst you are with him ;—and if you

"seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye for-
"sake him, he will forsake you."—Nothing could more powerfully call home the conscience than so timely an expostulation.—The men of Judah and Benjamin, struck with a sense of their late deliverance, and the many other felicities they had enjoyed since Asa was king over them, they gathered themselves together at Jerusalem, in the third month in the fifteenth year of Asa's reign;—and they entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers with all their heart, and with all their soul:—and they sware unto the Lord with a loud voice, and with shouting, and with trumpets, and with cornets; and all Judah rejoiced at the oath.

One may observe a kind of luxuriety in the description, which the holy historian gives of the transport of the men of Judah upon this occasion. And sure, if ever matter of joy was so reasonably founded, as to excuse any excesses in the expressions of it,—this was one;—for without it,—the condition of Judah, though otherwise the happiest, would have been, of all nations under heaven, the most miserable.

Let us suppose a moment, instead of being repulsed, that the enterprise of the Ethiopians had prospered against them,—like other grievous distempers, where the vitals are first attacked,—Asa, their king, would have been sought after, and have been made the first sacrifice.—He must either have fallen by the sword of battle, or execution; or, what is worse, he must have survived the ruin of his country by flight,—and worn out the remainder of his days in sorrow, for the afflictions which were come upon it. In some remote corner of the world,

the good king would have heard the particulars of Judah's destruction. He would have been told how the country, which had become dear to him by his paternal care, was now utterly laid waste, and all his labour lost;—how the fences which protected it were torn up, and the tender plant within, which he had so long sheltered, was cruelly trodden under foot and devoured. He would hear how Zerah, the Ethiopian, when he had overthrown the kingdom, thought himself bound in conscience to overthrow the religion of it too, and establish his own idolatrous one in its stead:—that, in pursuance of this, the holy religion which Asa had reformed, had begun everywhere to be evil spoken of, and evil entreated:—

That it was first banished from the courts of the king's house, and the midst of Jerusalem,—and then fled for safety out of the way into the wilderness, and found no city to dwell in:—That Zerah had rebuilt the altars of the strange gods, which Asa's piety had broken down, and set up their images:—

That his commandment was urgent that all should fall down and worship the idol he had made:—That to complete the tale of their miseries, there was no prospect of deliverance for any but the worst of his subjects;—those who, in his reign, had either leaned in their hearts towards these idolatries, or whose principles and morals were such, that all religions suited them alike;—but that the honest and conscientious men of Judah, unable to behold such abominations, hung down every man his head like a bulrush, and put sackcloth and ashes under him.

This picture of Judah's desolation might be some resemblance of what every one of Asa's subjects

would probably form to himself, the day he solemnized an exemption from it :—and the transport was natural,—To swear unto the Lord with a loud voice, and with shouting, and with trumpets, and with cornets ;—to rejoice at the oath which secured their future peace, and celebrate it with all external marks of gladness.

I have at length gone through the story, which gave the occasion to this religious act which is recorded of the men of Judah in the text.

I believe there is not one in sacred scripture that bids fairer for a parallel to our own times, or that would admit of an application more suitable to the solemnity of this day.

But men are apt to be struck with likenesses in so different a manner, from the different points of view in which they stand, as well as their diversity of judgments, that it is generally a very unacceptable piece of officiousness to fix any certain degrees of approach.

In this case it seems sufficient, that those who will discern the least resemblance, will discern enough to make them seriously comply with the devotion of the day ; and that those who are affected with it in a stronger manner, and see the blessing of a protestant king in its fairest light, with all the mercies who made way for it, will have still more abundant reason to adore that good Being, who has all along protected it from the enemies which have risen up to do it violence ; but more especially, in a late instance, by turning down the councils of the froward headlong, and confounding the devices of the crafty, so that their hands could not perform their enterprize. Though this event, for many

reasons, will ever be told amongst the felicities of these days; yet for none more so, than that it has given us a fresh mark of the continuation of God Almighty's favour to us:—a part of that great complicated blessing for which we are gathered together to return him thanks.

Let us therefore, I beseech you, endeavour to do it in the way which becomes wise men, and which is likely to be most acceptable;—and that is,—To pursue the intentions of his providence, in giving us the occasion to become better men, and, by an holy and an honest conversation, make ourselves capable of enjoying what God has done for us. In vain shall we celebrate the day with a loud voice, and with shouting, and with trumpets, if we do not do it likewise with the internal and more certain marks of sincerity, a reformation and purity in our manners. It is impossible a sinful people can either be grateful to God, or properly loyal to their prince. They cannot be grateful to the one, because they live not under a sense of his mercies; nor can they be loyal to the other, because they daily offend in two of the tenderest points which concern his welfare;—by first disengaging the providence of God from taking our part, and then giving a heart to our adversaries to lift their hands against us, who must know, that if we forsake God, God will forsake us. Their hopes, their designs, their wickedness against us, can only be built upon ours towards God.

For if they did not think we did evil, they durst not hope we could perish.

Cease, therefore, to do evil; for by following righteousness, you will make the hearts of your

enemies faint; they will turn their backs against your indignation,—and their weapons will fall from their hands;—

Which may God grant, through the merits and mediation of his Son Jesus Christ, to whom be all honour, &c. Amen.

SERMON XLI.

FOLLOW PEACE.

HEB. XII. 14.

Follow peace with all men, and holiness; without which, no man shall see the Lord.

The great end and design of our holy religion, next to the main view of reconciling us to God, was to reconcile us to each other;—by teaching us to subdue all those unfriendly dispositions in our nature which unfit us for happiness, and the social enjoyment of the many blessings which God has enabled us to partake of in this world, miserable as it is in many respects.—Could Christianity persuade the professors of it into this temper, and engage us, as its doctrine requires, to go on and exalt our natures, and, after the subduction of the most unfriendly of our passions, to plant, in the room of them, all those (more natural to the soil) humane and benevolent inclinations, which, in imitation of the perfections of God, should dispose us to extend our love and goodness to our fellow-creatures, according to the extent of our abilities,—in like manner as the goodness of God extends itself over all the works of the creation;—could this be accomplished,—the world would be worth living in; and might be considered by us as a foretaste of what we should enter upon hereafter.

But such a system, you'll say, is merely visionary;—and, considering man as a creature so base

with selfishness, and other fretful passions that propensity prompts him to,—though it is to be wished, it is not to be expected.—But our religion enjoins us to approach as near this fair pattern as we can; and, if it be possible, as much as lieth in us, to live peaceably with all men;—where the term, *if possible*, I own, implies it may not only be difficult, but sometimes impossible.—Thus the words of the text, "Follow peace," may by some be thought to imply, that this desirable blessing may sometimes fly from us:—but still we are required to follow it,—and not cease the pursuit till we have used all warrantable methods to regain and settle it; because, adds the apostle, without this frame of mind, "no man shall "see the Lord." For heaven is the region, as well as the recompense, of peace and benevolence; and such as do not desire and promote it here, are not qualified to enjoy it hereafter.

For this cause, in scripture-language,—peace is always spoke of as the great and comprehensive blessing, which included in it all manner of happiness;—and to wish peace to any house or person, was, in one word, to wish them all that was good and desirable;—because happiness consists in the inward complacency and satisfaction of the mind; and he who has such a disposition of soul, as acquiesce and rest contented with all the events of Providence, can want nothing this world can give him. Agreeable to this, that short but most comprehensive hymn, sung by angels at our Saviour's birth, declaratory of the joy and happy ends of his incarnation,—after glory, in the first, to God; the next note which sounded was, "Peace upon earth, "and good-will to men:" it was a publick wish of

happiness to mankind, and implied a solemn charge to pursue the means that would ever lead to it: and, in truth, the good tidings of the gospel are nothing else but a grand message and embassy of peace, to let us know that our peace is made in heaven.

The prophet Isaiah styles our Saviour the Prince of Peace, long before he came into the world; and to answer the title, he made choice to enter into it at a time when all nations were at peace with each other; which was in the days of Augustus, when the temple of Janus was shut, and all the alarms of war were hushed and silenced throughout the world. —At his birth, the host of heaven descended, and proclaimed peace on earth, as the best state and temper the world could be in to receive and welcome the Author of it.—His future conversation and doctrine here upon earth, was every way agreeable with his peaceable entrance upon it; the whole course of his life being but one great example of meekness, peace, and patience. At his death, it was the only legacy he bequeathed to his followers: —"My peace I give unto you."—How far this has taken place, or been actually enjoyed, is not my intention to enlarge upon, any further than just to observe how precious a bequest it was, from the many miseries and calamities which have and ever will ensue, from the want of it.—If we look into the larger circle of the world,—what desolations, dissolutions of government, and invasions of property!—what rapine, plunder, and profanation of the most sacred rights of mankind, are the certain unhappy effects of it!—fields dyed in blood,—the cries of orphans and widows, bereft of their best help, too ful-

ly instruct us.—Look into private life,—behold how good and pleasant a thing it is to live together in unity !—it is like the precious ointment poured upon the head of Aaron, that run down to his skirts ;—importing, that this balm of life is felt and enjoyed, not only by governors of kingdoms, but is derived down to the lowest rank of life, and tasted in the most private recesses ;—all, from the king to the peasant, are refreshed with its blessings ; without which we can find no comfort in any thing this world can give.—It is this blessing gives every one to sit quietly under his vine, and reap the fruits of his labour and industry :—in one word,—which bespeaks who is the bestower of it.—It is that only which keeps up the harmony and order of the world, and preserves every thing in it from ruin and confusion.

There is one saying of our Saviour's, recorded by St. Matthew, which, at first sight, seems to carry some opposition to this doctrine :—" I came not to " send peace on earth, but a sword."—But this reaches no farther than the bare words, not entering so deep as to affect the sense, or imply any contradiction :—intimating only,—that the preaching of the gospel will prove in the event, through sundry unhappy causes, such as prejudices, the corruption of mens hearts, a passion for idolatry and superstition, the occasion of much variance and division even amongst nearest relations ;—yea, and oftimes of bodily death, and many calamities and persecutions, which actually ensued upon the first preachers and followers of it.—Or the words may be understood,—as a beautiful description of the inward contests and opposition which Christianity

would occasion in the heart of man,—from its oppositions to the violent passions of our nature,—which would engage us in a perpetual warfare.—This was not only a sword,—a division betwixt nearest kindred—but it was dividing a man against himself;—setting up an opposition to an interest long established,—strong by nature,—more so by uncontrolled custom.—This is verified every hour in the struggles for mastery betwixt the principles of the world, the flesh, and the devil;—which set up so strong a confederacy, that there is need of all the helps which reason and christianity can offer to bring them down.

But this contention is not that against which such exhortations in the gospel are levelled;—for the scripture must be interpreted by scripture, and be made consistent with itself.—And we find the distinguishing marks and doctrines by which all men were to know who were Christ's disciples,—was that benevolent frame of mind towards all our fellow-creatures, which, by itself, is a sufficient security for the particular social duty here recommended:—so far from meditations of war,—for love thinketh no evil to his neighbour;—so far from doing any, it harbours not the least thought of it;—but, on the contrary, rejoices with them that rejoice, and weeps with them that weep.

This debt Christianity has highly exalted; though it is a debt that we were sensible of before, and acknowledged to be owing to human nature; which, as we all partake of,—so ought we to pay it in a suitable respect; for, as men, we are allied together in the natural bond of brotherhood, and are members one of another.—We have the same Father in

heaven, who made us, and takes care of us all.—Our earthly extraction too, is nearer alike than the pride of the world cares to be reminded of:—for Adam was the father of us all; and Eve the mother of all living.—The prince and the beggar sprung from the same stock, as wide asunder as the branches are. So that, in this view, the most upstart family may vie antiquity, and compare families with the greatest monarchs.—We are all formed too of the same mould, and must equally return to the same dust.—So that, to love our neighbour and live quietly with him, is to live at peace with ourselves:—he is but self-multiplied, and enlarged into another form; and to be unkind or cruel to him, is but, as Solomon observes of the unmerciful, to be cruel to our own flesh.—As a farther motive and engagement to this peaceable commerce with each other,—God has placed us all in one another's power by turns, in a condition of mutual need and dependence. There is no man so liberally stocked with earthly blessings, as to be able to live without another man's aid.—God, in his wisdom, has so dispensed his gifts, in various kinds and measures, as to render us helpful, and make a social intercourse indispensable. The prince depends on the labour and industry of the peasant; and the wealth and honour of the greatest persons, are fed and supported from the same source.

This the apostle hath elegantly set forth to us, by the familiar resemblance of the natural body;—wherein there are many members, and all have not the same office; but the different faculties and operations of each, are for the use and benefit of the whole. The eye sees not for itself, but for the other

members ;—and is set up as a light to direct them : —the feet serve to support and carry about the other parts ; and the hands act and labour for them all. It is the same in states and kingdoms, wherein there are many members, yet each in their several functions and employments ; which, if peaceably discharged, are for the harmony of the whole state.—Some are eyes and guides to the blind ;—others, feet to the lame and impotent ;—some supply the place of the head, to assist with council and direction ;—others the hands, to be useful by their labour and industry.—To make this link of dependence still stronger,—there is a great portion of mutability in all human affairs, to make benignity of temper not only our duty, but our interest and wisdom.—There is no condition in life so fixed and permanent as to be out of danger, or the reach of change :—and we all may depend upon it, that we shall take our turns of wanting and desiring.—By how many unforeseen causes may riches take wing! —The crowns of princes may be shaken, and the greatest that ever awed the world have experienced what the turn of the wheel can do. That which hath happened to one man, may befall another ; and, therefore, that excellent rule of our Saviour's ought to govern us in all our actions—" Whatsoever ye " would that men should do to you, do ye also unto " them likewise."—Time and chance happen to all ; —and the most affluent may be stript of all, and find his worldly comforts like so many withered leaves dropping from him.—Sure, nothing can better become us than hearts so full of our dependence, as to overflow with mercy, and pity, and good-will towards mankind ! To exhort us to this is, in other

words, to exhort us to "follow peace with all men:" —the first is the root;—this, the fair fruit and happy product of it.

Therefore, my beloved brethren, in the bowels of mercy, let us put away anger, and malice, and evil-speaking;—let us fly all clamour and strife; let us be kindly affected one to another,—following "peace "with all men, and holiness, that we may see the Lord:"

Which God of his infinite mercy grant, through the merits of his Son, our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

SERMON XLII.

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES.

ST. JOHN V. 39.

Search the Scriptures.

THAT things of the most inestimable use and value, for want of due application and study laid out upon them, may be passed by unregarded, nay, even looked upon with coldness and aversion, is a truth too evident to need enlarging on. Nor is it less certain that prejudices, contracted by an unhappy education, will sometimes so stop up all the passages to our hearts, that the most amiable objects can never find access, or bribe us by all their charms into justice and impartiality. It would be passing the tenderest reflection upon the age we live in, to say it is owing to one of these, that those inestimable books, the sacred writings, meet so often with a disrelish (what makes the accusation almost incredible) amongst persons who set up for men of taste and delicacy; who pretend to be charmed with what they call beauties and nature in classical authors, and in other things would blush not to be reckoned amongst sound and impartial criticks.—But so far has negligence and prepossession stopped their ears against the voice of the charmer, that they turn over those awful sacred pages with inattention and an unbecoming indifference, unaffected amidst ten thousand sublime and noble passages,

which, by the rules of sound criticism and reason, may be demonstrated to be truly eloquent and beautiful.

Indeed, the opinion of false Greek and barbarous language in the Old and New Testament, had, for some ages, been a stumbling-block to another set of men, who were professedly great readers and admirers of the antients.—The sacred writings were, by these persons, rudely attacked on all sides: expressions which came not within the compass of their learning, were branded with barbarism and solecism; words which scarce signified any thing but the ignorance of those who laid such groundless charges on them.—Presumptuous man!—Shall he, who is but dust and ashes, dare to find fault with the words of that Being, who first inspired man with language and taught his mouth to utter!—who opened the lips of the dumb, and made the infant eloquent!—These persons, as they attacked the inspired writing on the foot of criticks and men of learning, accordingly have been treated as such:—and tho' a shorter way might have been gone to work, which was,—that as their accusations reached no farther than the bare words and phraseology of the bible,—they in nowise affected the sentiments and soundness of the doctrines, which were conveyed with as much clearness and perspicuity to mankind, as they could have been, had the language been written with the utmost elegance and grammatical nicety: and even though the charge of barbarous idioms could be made out,—yet the cause of Christianity was thereby nowise affected, but remained just in the state they found it.—Yet, unhappily for them, they even miscarried in their favour-

ite point ;—there being few, if any at all, of the scripture-expressions, which may not be justified by numbers of parallel modes of speaking, made use of amongst the purest and most authentick Greek authors.—This, an able hand amongst us, not many years ago, has sufficiently made out, and thereby baffled and exposed all their presumptions and ridiculous assertions.—These persons, bad and deceitful as they were, are yet far outgone by a third set of men.—I wish we had not too many instances of them, who, like foul stomachs, that turn the sweetest food to bitterness, upon all occasions endeavour to make merry with sacred scripture, and turn every thing they meet with therein into banter and burlesque.—But as men of this stamp, by their excess of wickedness and weakness together, have entirely disarmed us from arguing with them as reasonable creatures, it is not only making them too considerable, but likewise to no purpose to spend much time about them,—they being, in the language of the apostle, "creatures of no understanding, speaking evil of things they know not, and shall utterly "perish in their own corruption."—Of these two last, the one is disqualified for being argued with,—and the other has no occasion for it ; they being already silenced.—Yet those that were first mentioned, may not altogether be thought unworthy of our endeavours ;—being persons, as was hinted before, who, though their tastes are so far vitiated that they cannot relish the sacred scriptures, yet have imaginations capable of being raised by the fancied excellencies of classical writers :—and indeed these persons claim from us some degree of pity, when, through the unskilfulness of preceptors in their

youth, or some other unhappy circumstance in their education, they have been taught to form false and wretched notions of good writing.—When this is the case, it is no wonder they should be more touched and affected with the dressed-up trifles and empty conceits of poets and rhetoricians, than they are with that true sublimity and grandeur of sentiment which glow throughout every page of the inspired writings.—By way of information, such should be instructed:—

There are two sorts of eloquence: the one indeed scarce deserves the name of it, which consists chiefly in labour'd and polish'd periods, an over-curious and artificial arrangement of figures, tinsell'd over with a gaudy embellishment of words, which glitter, but convey little or no light to the understanding.—This kind of writing is, for the most part, much affected and admired by people of weak judgment and vitious taste; but is a piece of affection and formality the sacred writers are utter strangers to.—It is a vain and boyish eloquence; and, as it has always been esteemed below the great geniuses of all ages, so much more so, with respect to those writers who were actuated by the spirit of Infinite Wisdom, and therefore wrote with that force and majesty with which never man writ.—The other sort of eloquence is quite the reverse of this; and which may be said to be the true characteristick of the holy scriptures; where the excellence does not arise from a laboured and far-fetched elocution, but from a surprising mixture of simplicity and majesty, which is a double character, so difficult to be united, that it is seldom to be met with in compositions merely human.—We see nothing in holy writ

of affectation and superfluous ornament.—As the infinite wise Being has condescended to stoop to our language, thereby to convey to us the light of revelation, so has he been pleased graciously to accommodate it to us with the most natural and graceful plainness it would admit of.—Now, it is observable, that the most excellent prophane authors, whether Greek or Latin, lose most of their graces whenever we find them literally translated.—Homer's famed representation of Jupiter, in his first book,—his cried-up description of a tempest ;—his relation of Neptune's shaking the earth, and opening it to its centre ;—his description of Pallas's horses ; with numbers of other long-since admired passages,—flag, and almost vanish away, in the vulgar Latin translation.

Let any one but take the pains to read the common Latin interpretation of Virgil, Theocritus, or even of Pindar,—and one may venture to affirm he will be able to trace out but few remains of the graces which charmed him so much in the original. —The natural conclusion from hence is, that, in the classical authors, the expression, the sweetness of the numbers, occasioned by a musical placing of words, constitute a great part of their beauties ;—whereas, in the sacred writings, they consist more in the greatness of the things themselves, than in the words and expressions.—The ideas and conceptions are so great and lofty in their own nature, that they necessarily appear magnificent in the most artless dress.—Look but into the bible, and we see them shine through the most simple and literal translations.—That glorious description which Moses gives of the creation of the heavens and the earth, which

Longinus, the best critick the eastern world ever produced, was so justly taken with, has not lost the least whit of its intrinsick worth; and, though it has undergone so many translations, yet triumphs over all, and breaks forth with as much force and vehemence as in the original.—Of this stamp are numbers of passages throughout the scriptures:—Instance that celebrated description of a tempest in the hundred-and-seventh Psalm; those beautiful reflections of holy Job upon the shortness of life, and instability of human affairs, so judiciously appointed by our church in her office for the burial of the dead;—that lively description of a horse of war, in the thirty-ninth chapter of Job, in which, from the 19th to the 26th verse, there is scarce a word which does not merit a particular explication to display the beauties of.—I might add to these, those tender and pathetick expostulations with the children of Israel, which run throughout all the prophets, which the most uncritical reader can scarce help being affected with:—

"And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men "of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my "vineyard.—What could have been done more to "my vineyard that I have not done?—wherefore, "when I expected that it should bring forth grapes, "brought it forth wild grapes?—and yet, ye say, "the way of the Lord is unequal!—Hear now, O "house of Israel, is not my way equal?—are not "your ways unequal?—have I any pleasure at all "that the wicked should die, and not that he should "return from his ways and live?—I have nourished "and brought up children, and they have rebelled "against me.—The ox knows his owner, and the ass

"his master's crib?—but Israel doth not know, my "people doth not consider."—There is nothing in all the eloquence of the heathen world comparable to the vivacity and tenderness of these reproaches;—there is something in them so thoroughly affecting, and so noble and sublime withal, that one might challenge the writings of the most celebrated orators of antiquity to produce any thing like them.—These observations upon the superiority of the inspired penmen to heathen ones, in that which regards the composition more conspicuously, hold good when they are considered upon the foot of historians.—Not to mention that prophane histories give an account only of human achievements and temporal events, which, for the most part, are so full of uncertainty and contradictions, that we are at a loss where to seek for truth;—but that the sacred history is the history of God himself,—the history of his omnipotence and infinite wisdom, his universal providence, his justice and mercy, and all his other attributes, displayed under a thousand different forms, by a series of the most various and wonderful events that ever happened to any nation or language.—Not to insist upon this visible superiority in sacred history,—there is yet another undoubted excellence the prophane historians seldom arrive at, which is almost the distinguishing character of the sacred ones; namely, that unaffected, artless manner of relating historical facts,—which is so entirely of a piece with every other part of the holy writings.—What I mean will be best made out by a few instances.—In the history of Joseph (which certainly is told with the greatest variety of beautiful and affecting circumstances)—when

Joseph makes himself known, and weeps aloud upon the neck of his dear brother Benjamin, that all the house of Pharaoh heard him; at that instant, none of his brethren are introduced as uttering aught, either to express their present joy, or palliate their former injuries to him.—On all sides, there immediately ensues a deep and solemn silence;—a silence infinitely more eloquent and expressive than any thing else that could have been substituted in its place. Had Thucydides, Herodotus, Livy, or any of the celebrated classical historians, been employed in writing this history,—when they came to this point, they would, doubtless, have exhausted all their fund of eloquence in furnishing Joseph's brethren with laboured and studied harangues; which, however fine they might have been in themselves, would, nevertheless, have been unnatural, and altogether improper on the occasion;—for, when such a variety of contrary passions broke in upon them.—what tongue was able to utter their hurried and distracted thoughts?—When remorse, surprise, shame, joy, and gratitude, struggled together in their bosoms, how uneloquently would their lips have performed their duty!—how unfaithfully would their tongues have spoken the language of their hearts!—In this case, silence was truly eloquent and natural, and tears expressed what oratory was incapable of.

If ever these persons I have been addressing myself to, can be persuaded to follow the advice in the text, of searching the scriptures,—the work of their salvation will be begun upon its true foundation;—for, first, they will insensibly be led to admire the beautiful propriety of their language:—

when a favourable opinion is conceived of this, next, they will more closely attend to the goodness of the moral, and the purity and soundness of the doctrines. —The pleasure of reading will still be increased, by that near concern which they will find themselves to have in those many important truths which they will see so clearly demonstrated in the bible, that grand charter of our eternal happiness.—It is the fate of mankind, too often, to seem insensible of what they may enjoy at the easiest rate.—What might not our neighbouring Romish countries, who groan under the yoke of popish impositions and priestcraft,—what might not those poor misguided creatures give, for the happiness which we know not how to value,—of being born in a country where a church is established by our laws, and encouraged by our princes !—which not only allows the free study of the scriptures, but even exhorts and invites us to it !—a church that is a stranger to the tricks and artifice of having the bible in an unknown tongue, to give the greater latitude to the designs of the clergy, in imposing their own trumpery, and foisting in whatever may best serve to aggrandize themselves, or enslave the wretches committed to their trust !—In short, our religion was not given us to raise our imaginations with ornaments of words, or strokes of eloquence ; but to purify our hearts, and lead us into the paths of righteousness. —However, not to defend ourselves—when the attack is principally levelled at this point,—might give occasion to our adversaries to triumph, and charge us either with negligence or inability.—It is well known how willing the enemies of our religion are to seek occasions against us !—how ready to

magnify every mote in our eyes to the bigness of a beam !—how eager, upon the least default, to insult and cry out,—There, there !—so would we have it ! —not, perhaps, that we are so much the subject of malice and aversion, but that the licentious age seems bent upon bringing Christianity into discredit at any rate ; and, rather than miss the aim, would strike through the sides of those that are sent to teach it.—Thank God, the truth of our holy religion is established with such strong evidence, that it rests upon a foundation never to be overthrown, either by the open assaults or cunning devices of wicked and designing men !—The part we have to act, is to be steady, sober, and vigilant ; to be ready to do every good work ; to reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with all long-suffering ; to give occasion of offence to no man ; that, with well-doing, we may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.

I shall close all with that excellent collect of our church :—

'Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy scriptures to be written for our learning,—grant that we may in suchwise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that, by patience and comfort of thy holy word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in thy Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ !'

Now to God the Father, &c.

SERMON XLIII.

PSALM XCV. 6, 7.

O come, let us worship and fall down before him :—for he is the Lord our God.—

In this psalm we find holy David taken up with the pious contemplation of God's infinite power, majesty, and greatness :—he considers him as the sovereign Lord of the whole earth, the Maker and Supporter of all things ;—that by him the heavens were created, and all the host of them ; that the earth was wisely fashioned by his hands ;—he has founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods :—that we likewise, the people of his pasture, were raised up by the same creating hand, from nothing, to the dignity of rational creatures, made (with respect to our reason and understanding) after his own most perfect image.

It was natural to imagine that such a contemplation would light up a flame of devotion in any grateful man's breast : and accordingly we find it break forth in the words of the text, in a kind of religious rapture,—

" O come, let us worship and fall down before " him ;—for he is the Lord our God."

Sure, never exhortation to prayer and worship can be better enforced than upon this principle,—that God is the Cause and Creator of all things ;—that each individual being is upheld in the station it was first placed, by the same hand which first formed

it;—that all the blessings and advantages which are necessary to the happiness and welfare of beings on earth, are only to be derived from the same Fountain;—and that the only way to do it, is to secure an interest in his favour, by a grateful expression of our sense for the benefits we have received, and a humble dependence upon him for those we expect and stand in need of.—"Whom have we in "Heaven," says the Psalmist, "but thee, O God, "to look unto or depend on!—to whom shall we "pour out our complaints, and speak of all our "wants and necessities, but to thy goodness, which "is ever willing to confer upon us whatever becomes "us to ask, and thee to grant!—because thou hast "promised to be nigh unto all that call upon thee, "—yea, unto all such as call upon thee faithfully;— "that thou wilt fulfil the desire of them that fear "thee; that thou wilt also hear their cry, and help "them!"

Of all duties, prayer certainly is the sweetest and most easy.—There are some duties which may seem to occasion a troublesome opposition to the natural workings of flesh and blood;—such as the forgiveness of injuries, and the love of our enemies:—others, which will force us unavoidably into a perpetual struggle with our passions,—which war against the soul;—such as chastity,—temperance,—humility.—There are other virtues, which seem to bid us forget our present interest for a while, such as charity and generosity;—others, that teach us to forget it at all times, and wholly to fix our affections on things above, and in no circumstance to act like men that look for a continuing city here, but upon one to come, whose builder and maker is

God. But this duty of prayer and thanksgiving to God,—has no such oppositions to encounter;—it takes no bullock out of thy field,—no horse out of thy stable,—nor he-goat out of thy fold;—it costeth no weariness of bones, no untimely watchings;—it requireth no strength of parts, or painful study, but just to know and have a true sense of our dependence, and of the mercies by which we are upheld:—and with this, in every place and posture of body, a good man may lift up his soul unto the Lord his God.

Indeed, as to the frequency of putting this duty formally in practice, as the precept must necessarily have varied according to the different stations in which God has placed us;—so he has been pleased to determine nothing precisely concerning it:—for, perhaps, it would be unreasonable to expect that the day-labourer, or he that supports a numerous family by the sweat of his brow, should spend as much of his time in devotion, as the man of leisure and unbounded wealth.—This, however, in the general, may hold good, that we are bound to pay this tribute to God, as often as his providence has put an opportunity into our hands of so doing,—provided that no plea, drawn from the necessary attentions to the affairs of the world, which many mens situations oblige them to, may be supposed to extend to an exemption from paying their morning and evening sacrifice to God.—For it seems to be the least that can be done to answer the demand of our duty in this point,—successively to open and shut up the day in prayer and thanksgiving,—since there is not a morning thou risest, or a night thou liest down, but thou art indebted for it to the watchful provi-

dence of Almighty God.—David and Daniel, whose names are recorded in scripture for future example :—the first, though a mighty king, embarrassed with wars abroad, and unnatural disturbances at home ; a situation, one would think, would allow little time for any thing but his own and his kingdom's safety,—yet found he leisure to pray seven times a day :—the latter, the counsellor and first minister of state to the great Nebuchadnezzar ; and, though perpetually fatigued with the affairs of a mighty kingdom, and the government of the whole province of Babylon, which was committed to his administration ;—though near the person of an idolatrous king, and amidst the temptations of a luxurious court,—yet never neglected he his God ; but, as we read,—he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before him.

A frequent correspondence with heaven, by prayer and devotion, is the greatest nourishment and support of spiritual life :—it keeps the sense of a God warm and lively within us,—which secures our disposition, and sets such guards over us, that hardly will a temptation prevail against us.—Who can entertain a base or an impure thought, or think of executing it, who is incessantly conversing with his God ?—or not despise every temptation this lower world can offer him, when, by his constant addresses before the throne of God's majesty, he brings the glorious prospect of heaven perpetually before his eyes ?

I cannot help here taking notice of the doctrine of those who would resolve all devotion into the inner man, and think that there is nothing more requisite to express our reverence to God, but purity

and integrity of heart,—unaccompanied either with words or actions.—To this opinion it may be justly answered, that, in the present state we are in, we find such a strong sympathy and union between our souls and bodies, that the one cannot be touched or sensibly affected, without producing some corresponding emotion in the other. Nature has assigned a different look, tone of voice, and gesture, peculiar to every passion and affection we are subject to; and, therefore, to argue against this strict correspondence which is held between our souls and bodies,—is disputing against the frame and mechanism of human nature.—We are not angels, but men clothed with bodies, and, in some measure, governed by our imaginations, that we have need of all these external helps which nature has made the interpreters of our thoughts:—and, no doubt, though a virtuous and a good life is more acceptable in the sight of God than either prayer or thanksgiving,—"for, behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and "to hearken, than the fat of rams;"—nevertheless as the one ought to be done, so the other ought not, by any means, to be left undone.—As God is to be obeyed,—so he is to be worshipped also;—for, although inward holiness and integrity of heart is the ultimate end of the divine dispensations,—yet, external religion is a certain means of promoting it:—each of them has its just bounds;—and therefore, as we could not be so carnal as merely to rest contented with the one, so neither can we pretend to be so spiritual as to neglect the other.

And though God is all-wise, and therefore understands our thoughts afar off,—and knows the exact degrees of our love and reverence to him, though

we should withhold those outward marks of it,—yet God himself has been graciously pleased to command us to pray to him;—that we might beg the assistance of his grace to work with us against our infirmities;—that we might acknowledge him to be, what he is, the Supreme Lord of the whole world;—that we might testify the sense we have of all his mercies and loving-kindness to us,—and confess that he has the propriety of every thing we enjoy,—that "the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness "thereof."

Thus much of this duty of prayer in general.—From every individual it may be reasonably expected, from a bare reflection upon his own station, his personal wants, and the daily blessings which he has received in particular;—but, for those blessings bestowed upon the whole species in common,—reason seems farther to require, that a joint return should be made by as many of the species as can conveniently assemble together for this religious purpose.—From hence arises, likewise, the reasonableness of publick worship, and sacred places set apart for that purpose; without which, it would be very difficult to preserve that sense of God and religion upon the minds of men, which is so necessary to their well-being, considered only as a civil society, and with regard to the purposes of this life, and the influence which a just sense of it must have upon their actions.—Besides, men who are united in societies, can have no other cement to unite them likewise in religious ties, as well as in manners of worship and points of faith, but the institution of solemn times and publick places destined for that use.

And it is not to be questioned, that if the time, as

well as place, for serving God, were once considered as indifferent, and left so far to every man's choice as to have no calls to publick prayer, however a sense of religion might be preserved a while by a few speculative men, yet that the bulk of mankind would lose all knowledge of it, and in time live without God in the world :—not that private prayer is the less our duty, the contrary of which is proved above ; and our Saviour says, that when we pray to God in secret, we shall be rewarded openly ;—but that prayers which are publickly offered up in God's house, tend more to the glory of God, and the benefit of ourselves :—for this reason, that they are presumed to be performed with greater attention and seriousness, and therefore most likely to be heard with a more favourable acceptance :—and for this, one might appeal to every man's breast, whether he has not been affected with the most elevated pitch of devotion, when he gave thanks in the great congregation of the saints, and praised God amongst much people ?—Of this united worship there is a glorious description which St. John gives us, in the Revelation, where he supposes the whole universe joining together, in their several capacities, to give glory in this manner to their common Lord. "Eve-
"ry creature which was in heaven, and on earth, and
"under the earth ; and such as were in the seas, and
"all that were in them, heard I, crying, Blessing,
"and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him
"that sitteth upon the throne."

But here it may be asked, that if publick worship tends so much to promote the glory of God,—and is what is so indispensably the duty and benefit of every christian state,—how came it to pass that our bless-

ed Saviour left no command to his followers, throughout the gospel, to set up publick places of worship, and keep them sacred for that purpose?—It may be answered,—That the necessity of setting apart places for divine worship, and the holiness of them when thus set apart, seemed already to have been so well established by former revelation, as not to need any express precept upon that subject;—for though the particular appointment of the temple, and the confinement of worship to that place alone, were only temporary parts of the Jewish covenant, yet, the necessity and duty of having places somewhere solemnly dedicated to God, carried a moral reason with it, and therefore was not abolished with the ceremonial part of the law.—Our Saviour came not to destroy, but to fulfil the law;—and therefore the moral precepts of it, which promoted a due regard to the divine Majesty, remained in as full force as ever.—And accordingly we find it attested, both by christian and heathen writers, that so soon as the second century, when the number of believers was much increased, and the circumstances of rich converts enabled them to do it,—that they began to erect edifices for divine worship; and though, under the frowns and oppressions of the civil power, they every sabbath assembled themselves therein, that with one heart and one lip they might declare whose they were, and whom they served; and, as the servants of one Lord, might offer up their joint prayers and petitions.

I wish there was no reason to lament an abatement of this religious zeal amongst christians of later days. Though the piety of our forefathers seems, in a great measure, to have deprived us of the merit of building churches for the service of God,

there can be no such plea for not frequenting them in a regular and solemn manner. How often do people absent themselves (when in the utmost distress how to dispose of themselves) from church, even upon those days which are set apart for nothing else but the worship of God!—when, to trifle that day away, or apply any portion of it to secular concerns, is a sacrilege almost in the literal sense of the word!

From this duty of publick prayer arises another, which I cannot help speaking of, it being so dependent upon it;—I mean a serious, devout, and respectful behaviour, when we are performing this solemn duty in the house of God. This is surely the least that can be necessary in the immediate presence of the Sovereign of the world, upon whose acceptance of our addresses all our present and future happiness depends.

External behaviour is the result of inward reverence, and is therefore part of our duty to God, whom we are to worship in body as well as spirit.

And as no one should be wanting in outward respect and decorum before an earthly prince or superior,—much less should we be so before him, whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain!

Notwithstanding the obviousness of this branch of duty,—it seems often to be little understood;—and whoever will take a general survey of church-behaviour, will often meet with scenes of sad variety.—What a vein of indolence and indevotion sometimes seems to run throughout whole congregations!—what ill-timed pains do some take in putting on an air of gaiety and indifference in the most interesting parts of this duty,—even when they are making confession of their sins, as if they were

ashamed to be thought serious with their God!—Surely, to address ourselves to his infinite Majesty, after a negligent and dispassionate manner, besides the immediate indignity offered,—is a sad sign we little consider the blessings we ask for, and far less deserve them.—Besides, what is a prayer, unless our hearts and affections go along with it?—It is not so much as the shadow of devotion; and little better than the papist telling their beads,—or honouring God with their lips, when their hearts are far from him! The consideration that a person is come to prostrate himself before the throne of high Heaven, and in that place which is particularly distinguished by his presence,—is sufficient inducement for any one to watch over his imagination, and guard against the least appearance of levity and disrespect.

An inward sincerity will of course influence the outward deportment; but where the one is wanting, there is great reason to suspect the absence of the other.—I own it is possible, and often happens, that this external garb of religion may be worn, when there is little within of a piece with it;—but I believe the converse of the proposition can never happen to be true, that a truly religious frame of mind should exist without some outward mark of it.—The mind will shine through the veil of flesh which covers it, and naturally express its religious dispositions;—and, if it possesses the power of godliness, —will have the external form of it too.

May God grant us to be defective in neither,—but that we may so praise and magnify God on earth, —that when he cometh, at the last day, with ten thousand of his saints in heaven, to judge the world, we may be partakers of their eternal inheritance! Amen.

SERMON XLIV.

THE WAYS OF PROVIDENCE JUSTIFIED TO MAN.

PSALM LXXIII. 12, 13.

Behold, these are the ungodly who prosper in the world; they increase in riches.

Verily, I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency.

This complaint of the Psalmist, concerning the promiscuous distribution of God's blessings to the just and unjust;—that the sun should shine without distinction upon the good and the bad,—and rains descend upon the righteous and unrighteous man,—is a subject that has afforded much matter for inquiry, and at one time or other has raised doubts to dishearten and perplex the minds of men. If the Sovereign Lord of all the earth does look on, whence so much disorder in the face of things?—why is it permitted, that wise and good men should be left often a prey to so many miseries and distresses of life,—whilst the guilty and foolish triumph in their offences; and even the tabernacles of robbers prosper?

To this it is answered,—That therefore there is a future state of rewards and punishments to take place after this life, wherein all these inequalities shall be made even,—where the circumstances of every man's case shall be considered, and where God shall be justified in all his ways, and every mouth shall be stopt.

If this was so,—if the ungodly were to prosper in the world, and have riches in possession,—and no distinction to be made hereafter,—to what purpose would it have been to have maintained our integrity?—"Lo! then, indeed, should I have cleansed "my heart in vain, and washed my hands in inno- "cency."

It is farther said, and what is a more direct answer to the point,—that when God created man,—that he might make him capable of receiving happiness at his hands hereafter,—he endowed him with liberty and freedom of choice, without which he could not have been a creature accountable for his actions;—that it is merely from the bad use he makes of these gifts,—that all those instances of irregularity do result, upon which the complaint is here grounded,—which could nowise be prevented, but by the total subversion of human liberty;—that should God make bare his arm, and interpose in every injustice that is committed,—mankind might be said to do what was right,—but, at the same time, to lose the merit of it, since they would act under force and necessity, and not from determinations of their own mind;—that upon this supposition,—a man could with no more reason expect to go to heaven for acts of temperance, justice, and humanity, than for the ordinary impulses of hunger and thirst, which nature directed;—that God has dealt with man upon better terms:—he has first endowed him with liberty and free-will;—he has set life and death, good and evil, before him;—that he has given him faculties to find out what will be the consequences of either way of acting, and then left him to take which course his reason and discretion shall point out.

I shall desist from enlarging any farther upon either of the foregoing arguments in vindication of God's providence, which are urged so often with so much force and conviction, as to leave no room for a reasonable reply ;—since the miseries which befall the good, and the seeming happiness of the wicked, could not be otherwise in such a free state and condition as this in which we are placed.

In all charges of this kind, we generally take two things for granted:—1st, That in the instances we give, we know certainly the good from the bad ;—and, 2diy, The respective state of their enjoyments or sufferings.

I shall therefore, in the remaining part of my discourse, take up your time with a short inquiry into the difficulties of coming not only at the true characters of men,—but likewise of knowing the degrees either of their real happiness or misery in this life.

The first of these will teach us candour in our judgment of others ;—the second,—to which I shall confine myself,—will teach us humility in our reasonings upon the ways of God.

For though the miseries of the good, and the prosperity of the wicked, are not in general to be denied,—yet I shall endeavour to shew, that the particular instances we are apt to produce, when we cry out in the words of the Psalmist, " Lo ! these are " the ungodly,—these prosper, and are happy in the " world ;"—I say, I shall endeavour to shew, that we are so ignorant of the articles of the charge,—and the evidence we go upon to make them good, is so lame and defective,—as to be sufficient by itself to to check all propensity to expostulate with God's

providence, allowing there was no other way of clearing up the matter reconcileably to his attributes.

And, first, what certain and infallible marks have we of the goodness or badness of the bulk of mankind?

If we trust to fame and reports,—if they are good, how do we know but they may proceed from partial friendship or flattery?—when bad, from envy or malice, from ill-natured surmises and constructions of things?—and, on both sides, from small matters aggrandized through mistake,—and sometimes through the unskilful relation of even truth itself?—From some, or all of which causes, it happens that the characters of men, like the histories of the Egyptians, are to be received and read with caution:—they are generally dressed out and disfigured with so many dreams and fables, that every ordinary reader shall not be able to distinguish truth from falsehood.—But allowing these reflections to be too severe in this matter,—that no such thing as envy ever lessened a man's character, or malice blackened it,—yet the characters of men are not easily penetrated, as they depend often upon the retired, unseen parts of a man's life.—The best and truest piety is most secret; and the worst of actions, for different reasons, will be so too.—Some men are modest and seem to take pains to hide their virtues;-and, from a natural distance and reserve in their tempers, scarce suffer their good qualities to be known.—Others, on the contrary, put in practice a thousand little arts to counterfeit virtues which they have not,—the better to conceal those vices which they really have;—and this under fair

shows of sanctity, good-nature, generosity, or some virtue or other,—too specious to be seen through,—too amiable and disinterested to be suspected.—These hints may be sufficient to show how hard it is to come at the matter of fact.—But one may go a step farther,—and say, that even that, in many cases, could we come to the knowledge of it, is not sufficient by itself to pronounce a man either good or bad.—There are numbers of circumstances which attend every action of a man's life, which can never come to the knowledge of the world,—yet ought to be known, and well weighed, before sentence with any justice can be passed upon him.—A man may have different views and a different sense of things from which his judges have; and what he understands and feels, and what passes within him, may be a secret treasured up deeply there forever.—A man, through bodily infirmity, or some complexional defect, which perhaps is not in his power to correct,—may be subject to inadvertencies,—to starts—and unhappy turns of temper; he may lie open to snares he is not always aware of; or, through ignorance and want of information and proper helps, he may labour in the dark:—in all which cases, he may do many things which are wrong in themselves, and yet be innocent;—at least an object rather to be pitied than censured with severity and ill-will.—These are difficulties which stand in every one's way in the forming a judgment of the characters of others.—But, for once, let us suppose them all to be got over, so that we could see the bottom of every man's heart;—let us allow that the word rogue or honest man, was wrote so legibly in every man's face, that no one could possible mistake it,—yet still the happiness of both the one and

the other, which is the only fact that can bring the charge home, is what we have so little certain knowledge of,—that, bating some flagrant instances, whenever we venture to pronounce upon it, our decisions are little more than random guesses.—For who can search the heart of man?—it is treacherous even to ourselves, and much more likely to impose upon others.—Even in laughter (if you will believe Solomon) the heart is sorrowful:—*the mind sits drooping, whilst the countenance is gay!*—and even he, who is the object of envy to those who look no farther than the surface of his estate,—may appear, at the same time, worthy of compassion to those who know his private recesses.—Besides this, a man's unhappiness is not to be ascertained so much from what is known to have befallen him,—as from his particular turn and cast of mind, and capacity of bearing it.—Poverty, exile, loss of fame or friends, the death of children, the dearest of all pledges of a man's happiness, make not equal impressions upon every temper.—You will see one man undergo, with scarce the expense of a sigh,—what another, in the bitterness of his soul, would go mourning for all his life long;—nay, a hasty word, or an unkind look, to a soft and tender nature, will strike deeper than a sword to the hardened and senseless.—If these reflections hold true with regard to misfortunes,—they are the same with regard to enjoyments:—we are formed differently,—have different tastes and perceptions of things;—by the force of habit, education, or a particular cast of mind,—it happens, that neither the use or possession of the same enjoyments and advantages, produce the same happiness and contentment;—but that it dif-

fe rs in every man almost, according to his temper and conmplexion;—so that the self-same happy accidents in life, which shall give raptures to the cholerick or sanguine man, shall be received with indifference by the cold and phlegmatick;—and so oddly perplexed are the accounts of both human happiness and misery in this world,—that trifles, light as air, shall be able to make the hearts of some men sing for joy;—at the same time that others, with real blessings and advantages, without the power of using them, have their hearts heavy and discontented.

Alas! if the principles of contentment are not within us,—the height of station and worldly grandeur will as soon add a cubit to a man's stature as to his happiness.

This will suggest to us how little a way we have gone towards the proof of any man's happiness,—in barely saying,—Lo! this man prospers in the world!—and this man has riches in possession!

When a man has got much above us, we take it for granted—that he sees some glorious prospects, and feels some mighty pleasures from his height;—whereas, could we get up to him, it is great odds whether we should find any thing to make us tolerable amends for the pains and trouble of climbing up so high,—nothing, perhaps, but more dangers and more troubles still;—and such a giddiness of head besides, as to make a wise man wish he was well down again upon the level.—To calculate, therefore, the happiness of mankind by their stations and honours, is the most deceitful of all rules:—great, no doubt, is the happiness which a moderate fortune, and moderate desires, with a consciousness

of virtue, will secure a man. Many are the silent pleasures of the honest peasant, who rises cheerfully to his labour.—Look into his dwelling—(where the scene of every man's happiness chiefly lies) ;—he has the same domestick endearments,—as much joy and comfort in his children,—and as flattering hopes of their doing well,—to enliven his hours and glad his heart, as you could conceive in the most affluent station :—and I make no doubt, in general, but, if the true account of his joys and sufferings were to be balanced with those of his betters,—that the upshot would prove to be little more than this,—That the rich man had the more meat,—but the poor man the better stomach :—the one had more luxury,—more able physicians to attend and set him to rights ;—the other, more health and soundness in his bones, and less occasion for their help : that, after these two articles betwixt them were balanced, —in all other things they were upon a level.—That the sun shines as warm,—the air blows as fresh, and the earth breathes as fragrant, upon the one as the other ; and that they have an equal share in all the beauties and real benefits of nature.—These hints may be sufficient to shew what I proposed from them, —the difficulties which attend us in judging truly either of the happiness or the misery of the bulk of mankind,—the evidence being still more defective in this case (as the matter of fact is hard to come at) —than even in that of judging of their true characters ; of both which, in general, we have such imperfect knowledge, as will teach us candour in our determinations upon each other.

But the main purport of this discourse is, to teach us humility in our reasonings upon the ways of the Almighty.

That things are dealt unequally in this world, is one of the strongest natural arguments for a future state,—and, therefore, is not to be overthrown; nevertheless, I am persuaded the charge is far from being as great as at first sight it may appear;—or, it if is, that our views of things are so narrow and confined, that it is not in our power to make it good.

But suppose it otherwise,—that the happiness and prosperity of bad men were as great as our general complaints make them,—and (what is not the case) —that we were not able to clear up the matter, or answer it reconcileably with God's justice and providence,—what shall we infer?—Why, the most becoming conclusion is,—That it is one instance more, out of many others, of our ignorance.—Why should this or any other religious difficulty he cannot comprehend,—why should it alarm him more than ten thousand other difficulties which every day elude his most exact and attentive search?—Does not the meanest flower in the field, or the smallest blade of grass, baffle the understanding of the most penetrating mind?—Can the deepest enquiries after nature tell us, upon what particular size and motion of parts the various colours and tastes of vegetables depend?—why one shrub is laxative,—another astringent?—why arsenick or hellebore should lay waste this noble frame of ours?—or opium lock up all the inroads to our senses, and plunder us, in so merciless a manner of reason and understanding? —Nay, have not the most obvious things that come in our way, dark sides, which the quickest sight cannot penetrate into? and do not the clearest and most exalted understandings find themselves puzzled, and at a loss, in every particle of matter?

Go then,—proud man !—and when thy head turns giddy with opinions of thy own wisdom, that thou wouldst correct the measures of the Almighty,—go then,—take a full view of thyself in this glass :—Consider thy own faculties, how narrow and imperfect ;—how much they are chequered with truth and falsehood ;—how little arrives at thy knowledge, and how darkly and confusedly thou discernest even that little, as in a glass :—consider the beginnings and endings of things, the greatest and the smallest, how they all conspire to baffle thee ;—and which way ever thou prosecutest thy enquiries,—what fresh subjects of amazement,—and what fresh reasons to believe there are more yet behind which thou canst never comprehend !—Consider,—these are but a part of his ways.—How little a portion is heard of him ?—" Canst thou, by searching, find out " God ?—wouldst thou know the Almighty to perfec-" tion ? It is as high as heaven, what canst thou " do ?—it is deeper than hell, how canst thou " know it ?"

Could we but see the mysterious workings of Providence, and were we able to comprehend the whole plan of his infinite wisdom and goodness, which, possibly, may be the case in the final consummation of all things ;—those events, which we are now so perplexed to account for, would probably exalt and magnify his wisdom, and make us cry out, with the apostle, in that rapturous exclamation,—" O ! the depth of the riches both of the goodness " and wisdom of God !—how unsearchable are his " ways, and his paths past finding out !"

Now to God, &c.

SERMON XLV.

THE INGRATITUDE OF ISRAEL.

II KINGS XVII. 7.

For so it was,—that the children of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt.

THE words of the text account for the cause of a sad calamity, which is related, in the foregoing verses, to have befallen a great number of Israelites, who were surprised in the capital city of Samaria, by Hosea, king of Assyria, and crully carried away by him out of their own country, and placed on the desolate frontiers of Halah, and in Haber, by the river Gozan, and in the city of the Medes, and there confined to end their days in sorrow and captivity.—Upon which the sacred historian, instead of accounting for so sad an event merely from political springs and causes ; such, for instance, as the superior strength and policy of the enemy, or an unseasonable provocation given,—or that proper measures of defence were neglected,—he traces it up, in one word, to its true cause :—" For so it was," says he, " that the children of Israel had sinned against the " Lord their God, who had brought them up out of " the land of Egypt."—It was surely a sufficient foundation to dread some evil,—that they had sinned against that Being who had an unquestionable right to their obedience.—But what an aggravation

was it,—that they had not only sinned simply against the truth, but against the God of mercies,—"who "had brought them forth out of the land of Egypt;" —who not only created, upheld, and favoured them with so many advantages in common with the rest of their fellow-creatures,—but who had been particularly kind to them in their misfortunes;—who, when they were in the house of bondage, in the most hopeless condition,—without a prospect of any natural means of redress, had compassionately heard their cry, and took pity upon the afflictions of a distressed people,—and, by a chain of miracles, delivered them from servitude and oppression:—miracles of so stupendous a nature, that I take delight to offer them, as often as I have an opportunity, to your devoutest contemplations.—This, you would think as high and as complicated an aggravation of their sins as could be urged:—this was not all;—for, besides God's goodness in first favouring their miraculous escape, a series of successes not to be accounted for from second causes and the natural course of events, had crowned their heads in so remarkable a manner, as to afford an evident proof, not only of his general concern for their welfare, but of his particular providence and attachment to them above all people upon earth. In the wilderness he led them like sheep, and kept them as the apple of his eye:—he suffered no man to do them wrong, but reproved even kings for their sake.—When they entered into the promised land,—no force was able to stand before them;—when in possession of it,—no army was able to drive them out:—and, in a word, nature, for a time, was driven backwards to serve them, and even the sun itself had

stood still in the midst of heaven, to secure their victories!

A people with so many testimonies of God's favour, who had not profited thereby, so as to become a virtuous people, must have been utterly corrupt:—and so they were.—And it is likely, from the many specimens they had given, in Moses's time, of a disposition to forget God's benefits, and, upon every trial, to rebel against him,—he foresaw they would certainly prove a thankless and unthinking people, extremely inclined to go astray and do evil;—and, therefore, if any thing was likely to bring them back to themselves, and to consider the evils of their misdoings,—it must be the dread of some temporal calamity, which, he prophetically threatened, would one day or other befall them;—hoping, no doubt, that if no principle of gratitude could make them an obedient people,—at least they might be wrought upon by the terror of being reduced back again by the same all-powerful hand to their first distressed condition;—which, in the end, did actually overtake them.—For, at length, when neither the alternatives of promises nor threatenings, when neither rewards nor corrections,—comforts nor afflictions, could soften them;—when continual instructions, warnings, invitations;—reproofs, miracles, prophets, and holy guides, had no effect, but, instead of making them grow better, apparently made them grow worse,—God's patience at length withdrew,—and he suffered them to reap the wages of their folly, by letting them fall into the state of bondage, from whence he had first raised them;—and that not only in that partial instance of those in Samaria, who were taken by Hosea,—but, I mean, in that

more general instance of their overthrow by the army of the Chaldeans ;—wherein he suffered the whole nation to be led away, and carried captive into Nineveh and Babylon.—We may be assured, that the history of God Almighty's just dealings with this froward and thoughtless people—was not wrote for nothing ;—but that it was given as a loud call and warning of obedience and gratitude, for all races of men to whom the light of revelation should hereafter reach ;—and, therefore, I have made choice of this subject, as it seems likely to furnish some reflections seasonable for the beginning of this week,—which should be devoted to such meditations as may prepare and fit us for the solemn fast which we are shortly to observe, and whose pious intention will not be answered by a bare assembling ourselves together, without making some religious and national remarks suitable to the occasion.—Doubtless, there is no nation which ever had so many extraordinary reasons and supernatural motives to become thankful and virtuous as the Jews had ;—which, besides the daily blessings of God's providence to them, has not received sufficient blessings and mercies at the hand of God, so as to engage their best services, and the warmest returns of gratitude they can pay.

There has been a time, may be, when they have been delivered from some grievous calamity,—from the rage of pestilence or famine,—from the edge and fury of the sword,—from the fate and fall of kingdoms round them :—they may have been preserved by providential discoveries of plots and designs against the well-being of their states, or by critical turns and revolutions in their favour, when

beginning to sink.—By some signal interposition of Gods' providence, they may have rescued their liberties, and all was dear to them, from the jaws of some tyrant;—or may have preserved their religion pure and uncorrupted, when all other comforts failed them.—If other countries have reason to be thankful to God for any one of these mercies,—much more has this of ours,—which, at one time or other, has received them all;—insomuch, that our history, for this last hundred years, has scarce been any thing but the history of our deliverances and God's blessings;—and these in so complicated a chain, such as were scarce ever vouchsafed to any people besides, except the Jews;—and, with regard to them, though inferior in the stupendous manner of their working,—yet no way so—in the extensive goodness of their effects, and the infinite benevolence and power which must have wrought them for us.

Here then let us stop to look back a moment, and inquire what great effects all this has had upon our sins, and how far worthy we have lived of what we have received.

A stranger, when he heard that this island had been so favoured by Heaven,—so happy in our laws and religion,—so flourishing in our trade,—and so blessed in our situation,—and so visibly protected in all of them by Providence,—would conclude, that our morals had kept pace with these blessings; and would expect that, as we were the most favoured by God Almighty, we must be the most virtuous and religious people upon earth.

Would to God there was any other reason to incline one to such a belief!—would to God that the appearance of religion was more frequent! for

that would necessarily imply the reality of it somewhere, and most probably in the greatest and most respectable characters of the nation.—Such was the situation of this country, till a licentious king introduced a licentious age.—The court of Charles the Second first brake in upon, and, I fear, has almost demolished the out works of religion, of modesty, and of sober manners;—so that, instead of any real marks of religion amongst us, you see thousands who are tired with carrying the mask of it, and have thrown it aside as a useless incumbrance.

But this licentiousness, he'll say, may be chiefly owing to a long course of prosperity, which is apt to corrupt mens minds.—God has since tried you with afflictions;—you have had lately a bloody and expensive war;—God has sent, moreover, a pestilence amongst your cattle,—"which has cut off the "stock from the fold, and left no herd in the stalls:" —besides,—you have just felt two dreadful shocks in your metropolis, of a most terrifying nature;—which, if God's providence had not checked and restrained within some bounds, might have overthrown your capital, and your kingdom with it.

Surely, he'll say,—all these warnings must have awakened the consciences of the most unthinking part of you, and forced the inhabitants of your land, from such admonitions, to have learned righteousness.—I own, this is the natural effect, and, one would hope, should always be the improvement from such calamities;—for we often find, that numbers of people, who in their prosperity seemed to forget God,—do yet remember him in the days of trouble and distress;—yet, consider this nationally, —we see no such effect from it, as, in fact, one would expect from speculation.

For instance :—With all the devastation and bloodshed which the war has occasioned,—how many converts has it made either to virtue or frugality ?—The pestilence amongst our cattle, though it has distressed, and utterly undone so many thousands,—yet what one visible alteration has it made in the course of our lives ?

And though, one would imagine, that the necessary drains of taxes for the one, and the loss of rent and property from the other,—should, in some measure, have withdrawn the means of gratifying our passions as we have done,—yet what appearance is there amongst us that it is so ?—what one fashionable folly or extravagance has been checked ?—Are not the same expenses of equipage, and furniture, and dress,—the same order of diversions, perpetually returning, and as great luxury and epicurism of entertainments, as in the most prosperous condition ?—So that, " though the head is sick, and the " whole heart is faint," we all affect to look well in the face, either as if nothing had happened, or we were ashamed to acknowledge the force and natural effects of the chastisements of God.—And if, from the effects which war and pestilence have had,—we may form a judgment of the moral effects which this last terror is likely to produce,—it is to be feared, however we might be startled at first,—that the impressions will scarce last longer than the instantaneous shock which occasioned them :—and I make no doubt,—should a man have courage to declare his opinion,—' That he believed it was an in-' dication of God's anger upon a corrupt genera-' tion,'—that it would be great odds but he would be pitied for his weakness, or openly laughed at for his

superstition.—Or if, after such a declaration,—he was thought worth setting right in his mistake,—he would be informed,—that religion had nothing to do in explications of this kind :—that all such violent vibrations of the earth were owing to subterraneous caverns falling down of themselves, or being blown up by nitrous and sulphureous vapours rarified by heat ;—and that it was idle to bring in the Deity to untie the knot, when it came to be resolved easily into natural causes.—Vain unthinking mortals !—as if natural causes were any thing else in the hands of God—but instruments which he can turn to work the purposes of his will, either to reward or punish, as seems fitting to his infinite wisdom.

Thus no man repenteth him of his wickedness, saying,—What have I done ?—but every one turneth to his course, as a horse rusheth into the battle. —To conclude :—However we may under-rate it now, it is a maxim of eternal truth,—which both reasonings and all accounts from history confirm,—that the wickedness and corruption of a people will sooner or later always bring on temporal mischiefs and calamities :—and can it be otherwise ?—for a vitious nation not only carries the seeds of destruction within, from the natural workings and course of things,—but it lays itself open to the whole force and injury of accidents from without ;—and I do venture to say,—there never was a nation or people fallen into troubles or decay,—but one might justly leave the same remark upon them which the sacred historian makes in the text, upon the misfortunes of the Israelites,—" for so it was,—that they had " sinned against the Lord their God."

Let us, therefore, constantly bear in mind that conclusion of the sacred writer,—which I shall give you in his own beautiful and awful language :—

" But the Lord, who brought you up out of the " land of Egypt, with great power and a stretch'd " out arm, him shall ye fear, and him shall ye wor- " ship,—and to him shall ye do sacrifice.—And the " statutes, and the ordinances, and the command- " ments he wrote for you, ye shall observe to do for- " evermore.—The Lord your God ye shall fear ;— " and he shall deliver you out of the hand of all your " enemies."

Now to God the Father, &c.

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